

SPEC

THE CANADIAN
MAGAZINE OF
SPECULATIVE
WRITING

Volume 2, Number 3
Winter 1990
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with
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EDITORIAL

by Marianne O. Nielsen

Why is *ON SPEC* publishing a special youth issue? Good question.

The *ON SPEC* cooperative, a.k.a. the Copper Pig Writers' Society, has been involved with young writers and artists, through science fiction conventions and through the Writers Guild of Alberta, for years. We are very aware of the talent stomping on our boot heels, or sneaker heels, as the case may be. We recognize that there are a number of unfortunate difficulties facing young writers and artists. First, where it is difficult for adult Canadian writers of speculative fiction to find a paying market for their work, it is doubly difficult for young writers. Ditto for artists. It is also difficult for young writers and artists to get criticism from professionals in their field.

Because of *ON SPEC*'s normal policy of providing critiques on the majority of submissions, we thought we might provide at least a temporary conduit. But there is still the problem of getting your work seen. We decided that, using *ON SPEC*, we had a unique opportunity to show the rest of the world examples of the excellent work being done by young writers and artists in Canada. The content of this magazine is bright testimony to that.

Speaking of "in Canada," we are happy to report that we received submissions from almost every province in Canada. Considering the number of submissions from specific schools, these have either students or English teachers or both, who are very appreciative of speculative fiction.

In addition to our young contributors, we are happy to have stories in this issue from Keynyn Brysse, the winner of the Alberta Speculative Fiction Association annual writing contest; Monica Hughes, well-known author of speculative fiction novels for young adults; and Nicole Luiken, Alberta's fastest up-and-coming young writer of speculative fiction. Special mention must also be made of the contributions of Reg Silvester, who expresses the urgency of encouraging young writers, and Hazel Sangster, who has contributed a delightful piece on how to get your speculative fiction stories bought by editors.

There are a great many other acknowledgements that must be made for this issue: First and foremost to *ON SPEC*'s Editorial Advisory Board for agreeing so enthusiastically to taking on this extra

project. Secondly to Richard Davies, who replaced the travelling Doug Barbour, on the Board. Readers may remember Richard's poem "Teechurs aftur ours" in Volume 1, Number 2. Immense gratitude must also be expressed to Claire Stirling, who laboured mightily for us this summer as our Editorial Assistant. Claire is a journalism student at Carleton University. She wanted experience in small press publication — and did she ever get it! We owe you our life blood, Claire. Best of luck in your studies. Gratitude must also be directed towards Susan MacGregor, Robert Runté, and Jane Spalding, three brave souls who backed up their support for young writers by volunteering to work as a special committee to produce this youth issue.

Many, many thanks are also due to Film and Literary Arts who backed their faith in this project with cold, hard cash (well, a cheque, actually, but it sounded so much more poetic the other way).

I am also expressing gratitude in advance to you, the readers. Spread this issue around. If you know of any young artists or writers that need encouragement, show them this issue and tell them that publication is, indeed, possible. If they say, "Yeah, but — this is just a one-shot deal," I am happy to say that the majority of stories appearing in this issue would have had no problem being accepted for a regular issue of *ON SPEC* (in fact, one was — but that would take too long to explain).

This issue is proud to present the future leading artists and writers of speculative fiction in Canada. Now — start turning the pages and enjoy. ☘



ConText '91 / CanVention XI (the Canadian national SF conference) will take place June 7 - 9, 1991, Lister Hall, University of Alberta. Membership information from ConText '91, The Word-Works Bldg., 10523 - 100 Ave., Edmonton, AB T5J 0A8. (Admission is free to members of the Speculative Writers' Association of Canada.)

GUEST EDITORIAL

by Reg Silvester

I was teaching an introductory prose class at the Saskatchewan Summer School of the Arts at Fort San, a facility where they treated tuberculosis before they found a cure. The San is a crotchety collection of buildings linked underground by dank service tunnels through which you can get to places shut off from above, and find relics of the TB era — iron beds, chairs, bureaus, pictures. Some kids even claimed they'd found the abandoned morgue.

My class was a mixture of teenagers and older people in their first writing class. Among the teens was a guy who wanted to write horror fantasies, and while everyone else took my advice and wrote from their own experience, this guy was rewriting every horror movie he'd seen.

It was against the rules to use the tunnel, but my group secretly planned to do it anyway. I told them not to bother whispering around me, since it wasn't my job to enforce the rules, but if they were going to be stupid enough to go down there, at least come up with a story. And that's how this one student found a setting where he could imagine his own horrible fantasies and write them.

Since then I've spent a few hours in classrooms and libraries talking to young writers. More and more I hear them express an interest in writing horror or fantasy or SF. The realm of the imagination is not as strange a place to teenagers as it is to those of us who have been told to grow up and face reality. They do well on that terrain.

Another thing I've noticed about students in high school is that they enjoy reading stuff by others their age. I usually take copies of *Wind-script*, the Saskatchewan magazine by and for young writers, on my visits to Alberta schools. They elicit a lot of interest and a bit of envy.

So I can only say "right on" to *ON SPEC* for this special edition. For these young writers, the chance to see their stories in print gives them a new view on their work and perhaps some ideas on how to improve. It's special that teenaged readers get a chance to see what their peers imagine. It might even inspire more of this imagining on paper.

In recent years, as I scan the faces at writers' conferences and calculate the average age, it seems to be creeping slowly higher. And I think that as a group we writers need to feed the children, so to speak, so they'll grow and join us and eventually replace us. This effort by *ON SPEC* helps, as will more of the same if we get it from this and other publications. ☺

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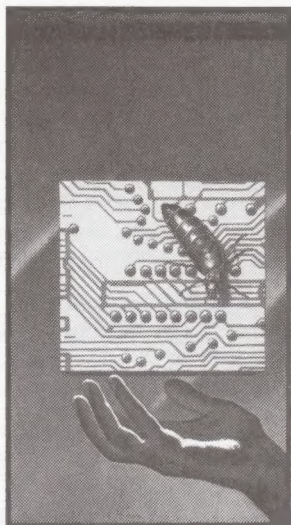
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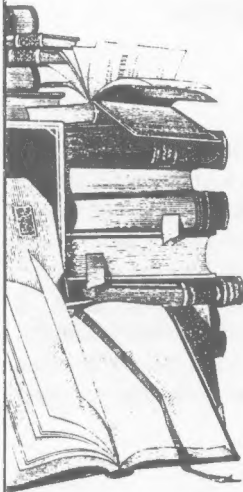
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Upon Waking

by Nicole Luiken

illustration by Aaron Johnston

woke up this morning with long hair. There. I said it. Miss Mulligan was right: things don't sound as bad when you write them down. In fact it isn't bad at all — there's nothing wrong with long hair. I like long hair. I just never had long hair before.

Long, curly red hair. I never had curly hair before, either. Or maybe I did but just didn't know it because it was kept short. It was very short and straight and red when I brushed my teeth last night.

But you don't care about that. I'm babbling. I always babble when I'm nervous and I'm very nervous right now because, you see, long hair wasn't all I woke up with this morning.

I also woke up with:

1. long fingernails,
2. a pink nightgown,
3. C cup breasts,
4. blurry vision,
5. a big stomach, and
6. a strange man in my bed.

No, that's not quite true, and I'm trying to be very truthful right now. There was a strange man beside me in a bed that wasn't my bed.

I'm going to take these things one by one because my grade five teacher Miss Mulligan always said to take things one at a time and not panic. She said that if you think things through you can nearly always find an explanation. Miss Mulligan is a very calm person and I'd like to be calm right now. I'd like it a lot.

1. Long fingernails. I never had long fingernails before either, 'cause I always chew on them which is a very bad habit but I can't seem to stop. I'm chewing on them right now. They're real fingernails too,



— 大 —
©90

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not just Lee Press-on Nails. I checked. Maybe someone came in at night and sprinkled growth formula on me so my hair and nails grew.

2. A pink nightgown. Pink's my favourite colour but I never ever wear it because it clashes with my red hair. The nightgown I wore last night was green with yellow ducks on it.

3. C cup breasts. Yesterday I was puffing out my chest and wishing I could wear a training bra like Brenda Frew. If you overheard me, fairy godmother, I take it back. I take it all back.

4. Blurry vision. I couldn't see very well when I woke up this morning which is why the strange man is the last thing on my list. I found a pair of glasses and a pile of five sugar cubes by the bed and they helped — the glasses, I mean. I know I didn't wish for blurry vision so I guess my fairy godmother didn't do it.

5. A big stomach. I should probably be more specific about that. Miss Mulligan says I'm not specific enough when I write. I'm not really fat. Well, I am, but I'm not. I think I'm pregnant. I'm sorry, Miss Mulligan, but I can't think of an explanation for that one. I'm not doing very well on the calm part either.

6. The strange man in the bed that isn't my bed. I wasn't very calm when I saw him either. I probably would have screamed but I was too afraid of waking him up.

I tried to sneak out of bed instead but the bed creaked and he rolled over. He called me Gwen. At least my name hasn't changed. He told me to put on the coffee.

I followed the hallway around a corner and found the kitchen and the living room. There's a little boy in there watching cartoons. Bugs Bunny. I watched Bugs Bunny yesterday. He called me Mommy.

Well, Miss Mulligan, I've been sitting here thinking and thinking and trying to be calm like you always said I should do, but I can't find an explanation.

At first I thought it might be a dream so I pinched myself really really hard with my long fingernails and now I'm bleeding but I didn't wake up and I don't know where the bandages are and I'm sorry Miss Mulligan 'cause this is a really big run-on sentence and I know you hate run-on sentences but I think I'm going to cry now.

I got up to get myself a Kleenex and I found a note on the refrigerator. I think I understand now.

It says: "Dear Gwen, Please accept our thanks for the loan of your body while your mind slept. We of the planet Sillirt had an enlightening and enjoyable vacation but we must leave now. Our knowledge of humans is now much more complete. You may experience some slight disorientation upon waking; for this reason we kept our visit short — a mere decade. We apologize for any inconvenience you may

have suffered during our brief visit. Please accept the 5 sils by your bed as payment. Farewell until we meet again."

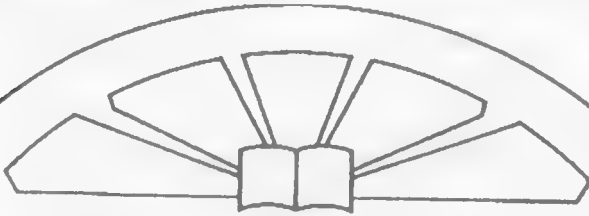
I think it must be true. The note's in my handwriting.

Nobody's going to believe me, are they, Miss Mulligan? Not even you.

I think I'll try to make the coffee now. ☺

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Maculate Conception

by Peter Tupper

illustration by Chris Harper

S *electd excerpts from the personal journal of Dawn Theria-Bishop*

• *December 25*

UNS Dandridge M. Cole, en route to Mars orbital.

We had Christmas/Chanukah today. It was a lot more fun than I thought it would be. The guys in maintenance put together a tree of sorts out of old aluminum foil and decorated it with broken electronics components. Everybody trotted out Christmas traditions from back home, and exchanged presents. They weren't much really, as the PX has pretty much been picked clean since we left cislunar space four months ago.

I've been keeping busy, running errands for the solar observatory and holding classes on p-suits and emergency drills, which is actually kind of fun. With my Systems Corps experience, I'm the natural choice, plus the fact that I've been living in space all my life.

Over dinner I got involved with a kind of uncomfortable conversation...

■

"...well, why don't you ask her?" Perezze said.

"All right, I will." returned Gonneau. He turned around and called across the mess hall, "Ms. Theria, would you please join us for a moment?"

On the other side of the *Cole's* recreation module, a lithe, black-



haired woman nodded, swallowed the last of her Vietnamese shrimp roll, and pushed off her perch. She somersaulted in flight to the other bulkhead, rebounded, did a barrel roll on the way back, and killed her motion on the table. Several of the less freefall-comfortable diners turned away, unsettled by the woman's refusal to hold to freefall etiquette.

She hooked her foot under the bar at the bottom of the table. She had long jet-black hair with an even speckling of platinum blonde pin points. Combined with her thin but well built frame, her hair marked her as a spaceborn mutant. "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

Before Gonneau could start, Perezzo explained, "We've been having a discussion—"

"Argument."

"—over whether spaceborns should be considered a separate race or not. It seems to me that they would be, as they're— you're quite different from earthborns, physically and genetically."

"You don't ask much, do you?" The world's first child born in space settled back, disdaining the rest pads, interlaced her long aristocratic fingers and began. "Well, personally I haven't really worried about it. I don't have to, not with Serge Promatov and his bunch making a nuisance of themselves at the Vatican and Mecca.

"The facts are, spaceborns do retain racial characteristics from the parents, epicanthic folds and so forth. We're still not sure as to how much of physical appearance in spaceborns is actually genetic and how much is environmental. A spaceborn raised on earth would probably answer that question, but there probably won't be any volunteers."

"Excuse me, but don't spaceborns develop depression if they spend too long on Earth?" Perezzo asked.

"Oh, the gee-blues? That's just a myth. Sure, some do get down in the mouth, but that's simply because they don't like not being able to change gravity whenever they feel like it. I've spent months on Earth, and I've felt fine. Besides, most of the spaceborns are teenagers or little kids, and likely to be moody.

"Anyway, back to your question. R.C. Fotinakas and his 'Humanity Council' consider us like homosexuals, clones and cyborgs, untouchable. Moslems still haven't got a real opinion on the subject, even after twenty-four years. There are, of course, lunatic fringers who say we're devils, or angels, or both, but no one worries about them. Hindus and Buddhists are pretty reasonable about such things—"

"Unlike you westerners," an Indian voice chimed in from the conversation at the other end of the table.

"Thank you.. Prabhana, is it? The bottom line, gentlemen, is that any person exposed to significantly less than earth-gee before the

quickenings as a fetus will invariably develop mutations that allow the person to function better in freefall. Spaceborn bones don't decalcify, hearts don't shrink, backs don't expand, fluids don't redistribute. Spaceborns are also more resistant to disorientation and have superior three-dimensional spatial sense. Something to do with the semi-circular canals. You know, I had exploratory surgery in my ears." Dawn Theria turned the side of her head to Perezzo, brushed back her hair and said, "Look, can you see the scar? Look closely. Can you see it?"

"Er... uh... yes," Perezzo said uncertainly. He had no idea what this woman's ear was supposed to look like.

"Dammit—" She slapped her fist into her palm. "They told me you wouldn't be able to see the scar!" She replaced her frown with a easy smile that said just kidding. "This is just me speaking, but spaceborns aren't really a racial group at all, and shouldn't be considered as such."

Perezzo and Gonneau looked askance at each other. "I see. Thank you," the Argentine said.

As Dawn Theria prepared to leave, Gonneau asked, "Excuse me, Miss Theria, but what about the Orbital Confederation?"

"What about it?" she returned, but her easy grace was now subdued.

"Well, surely you know of the reports of discrimination against spaceborns that have been coming out since the War?"

"Yes, I do. So?"

"Don't you have any opinion on that?"

"The earthborn Orbitals are pursuing the course of bigotry because they are trying to deny a fact, and it poses grave problems," she said stiffly.

"I see," said Perezzo. "It's like pre-millennial South Africa, except that all the children will be born blacks."

"Precisely. They can't win. Gentlemen, if you'll excuse me." Her demeanour indicated the discussion was closed. Gonneau, oblivious, started, "But you used to be with the OrbCon— as the first, surely you must..."

Dawn floated free from the toe-rail, turned perpendicular to the diners' vertical, and kicked off. She struck the rec module's door and vanished, heading for the single women's quarters. All her astrobatonic maneuvers were done not with the exacting grace of an Olympic gymnast, but with the ease of an ordinary person walking.

"You just don't know when to shut up, do you?" Perezzo chided his companion.

A large black man was suddenly present. "Excuse me, but as a member of the National Azania Party I couldn't help but overhear..."

Perezzo winced and concentrated on his food, leaving Gonneau

16 *Maculate Conception*

to deal with the South African nationalist. Served him right for dragging politics into every thing.

*

My fame precedes me, wherever I go. Well, at least out here the media can't breathe too far down my neck. Still, that got me thinking. It worries me that spaceborns may become some kind of oppressed minority, particularly because they can't be segregated.

David's and my children are going to be spaceborns, every single one of them, I have decided. Still, there is a lot we don't know about space-adapted obstetrics and genetics. I'm still waiting for the results on Henri and Nina Croix's baby, Samuel. He's the first child born of two spaceborn parents, and I know that a lot of people are waiting to see how he turns out. He certainly looked normal at the christening, with the full set of freefall mutations. I wonder if it's true that Nina and Henri were paid to get married and have a child?

*

• *January 3*

UNS D.M. Cole, en route to Mars orbital.

I just had a horrible thought. What if spaceborn children from even partially spaceborn parents are so well adapted to freefall that they can't live in Earth's gravity? As much as I love space, there are some wonderful things on Earth as well, and I wouldn't want my children to have any limitations imposed on them. Maybe David's Earthborn genes—

■

• *January 5*

UNS D.M. Cole, en route to Mars orbital.

Whew! What a day! I broke the last entry off because we had a solar flare alert. All the crew and passengers hustled off to the flare shelter even faster than they did in practice. I guess my training paid off.

The *Cole's* storm cellar is a standard habitation module that's surrounded by the water tanks and one of the fuel cell assemblies. All that water pretty much brings the radiation in flares to acceptable levels. In one corner there's a sphere of lunar concrete, extra shielding, which is reserved for pregnant women and young children, to protect them from the extra rem dosage.

We had a big surprise when word got around that the "baby ball" was occupied by Mrs. Cheng. Dr. McDale checked her out and confirmed what her personal test kit already said: pregnant, about five days. Now that was a real bombshell. It's been the only topic of conversation thus far. I heard rumours to the effect that the Chengs emigrated to space to avoid the tough childbirth laws in the Hong

Kong Protectorate. They'll probably be facing a heavy fine when word gets to UNSA. You can't go around dropping mouths to feed into small ecologies like a cyclor or Deimos Station.

Mrs. Cheng had not studied up on freefall mutations. As we were all sitting around twiddling our thumbs and waiting for the flare to be over, I visited her, put on my "world's foremost layman" hat and listed all the benefits her child would be receiving simply by living in freefall. I went on and on, saying how it put a major kink in Darwin (much to the delight of the creationists). In all fairness, I did tell her about the few drawbacks, though I can't see the Chengs fretting over their child not being baptized.

I must have said something wrong because she spoke in Cantonese or something to her husband (she doesn't speak Esperanto or English very well) who then asked me to leave, very politely. Well! Actually, I was so surprised that I couldn't very well object. I spent the rest of the time in the shelter flipping through magazines on the medianet (and trying to hide my ridiculous nightgown, which I have found to be totally inconvenient in freefall and will never wear again).

• *January 8*

UNS Dandridge M. Cole, en route to Mars orbital.

Mars is just barely a disc instead of a red point of light, to the naked eye. We'll rendezvous with the passenger carrier from Deimos in a few days. Everybody is rushing around getting everything packed for Deimos and leaving space for the people rotating back to Earth. The single women's quarters are a mess; everybody is trying to get their clothes back from whoever they loaned them to.

UNSA is still dickering over the Cheng baby, while the parents are being subjected to the rumour mill. At least the press can't get at them.

*

• *January 11*

UNS Valentina Treshkova, en route to Mars Orbital.

The *Treshkova* is a biconic spacecraft, a lot like the landers from the first Mars missions but bigger. I recall some other people griping about how small the quarters were and the fact that the single people were four to a room when we first left cislunar. That was luxury compared to this. The cabin is set up like an airplane, except we're expected to spend thirty-six hours like this. "Steerage to the stars." On the bright side, after five months we mercifully get to see some new faces and eat some new cooking. Corn on the cob, lentils, roast gerbil with mushrooms, and dates for dessert!

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• January 12

UNS *Valentina Treshkova*, on lower reach of Deimos tether, en route to Deimos station.

Properly speaking, Deimos Station is not on Deimos. It orbits a few kilometers away. It's a fairly standard station, an old reliable Wohnrad-B, designed to hold about four hundred people. There's a tidally-stabilized central spar, with tethers running up and down at each end. Sunlight is brought inside by mirror arrays. Below that is the centrifuge, which provides a maximum spin-gee of about 5.88 meters per second squared (that's 0.6 gees in the vernacular) where the members of the Mars survey and the employees of PhobosCorp live.

Treshkova aerobraked in Mars' atmosphere, giving us a spectacular view that compensated for the hours of cramped travel. I enjoyed it. Aerobraking is one of the few times in modern space travel that you feel like you're actually moving.

Having dumped enough velocity, *Treshkova* caught the bottom end of the Deimos tether and is now in the process of being hauled up. We've spent the time being oriented and assigned our rooms and jobs. I get to share another room with three single women. (Oh joy. Being married while your husband is millions of kilometers away is a little trying.) We were also issued patches, even though the various Survey agencies were civilian groups. I'm a cross-trained life support tech and computer troubleshooter, so I get a green infinity symbol and a silver star.

They also explained the exact relationship between the Mars Survey and PhobosCorp. First of all, PhobosCorp doesn't own Phobos; it merely has the exclusive franchise to extract water, carbon and other volatiles which you can't get from the Moon. The Mars Survey has jurisdiction everywhere else, orbital or surface. The tethers are a tricky matter. They're owned by UNSA itself, but the Deimos tethers are operated by the Service, and the Phobos tethers are run by PhobosCorp. This causes a few problems, in that both parties need both sets of tethers. PhobosCorp and the Survey don't like each other at all.

■

• January 28

UNSA Mars Survey Station, Deimos.

Sorry I haven't made an entry for so long. I've been very busy. I just got back from the Challenger Day ceremony.

Forget job descriptions. Everybody wears about six different hats here. In between doing my assigned jobs, I also monitor the atmospheric balloon rovers, help out at the traffic control centre, run errands for the chemistry lab and clean up after my roommates. No

wonder UNSA sends all their would-be explorers here; either they drop out or they become the best spacefarers around.

My roommates aren't so bad. Two of them, Ronette Kingston and Andrea Chimpopoulos, spend very little time here. They seem intent on dating the entire male employees' list of PhobosCorp. Well, everybody needs a hobby. They're assistant something or others.

The third is Dr. Takata Toshiko. She's some kind of planetary ecologist, a tiny little Japanese girl around my age. She's quiet as a mouse, drinks alarming amounts of coffee and spends most of her time poring over complicated spreadsheets. Her sole pastime seems to be Japanese science fiction cartoons— sorry, *anime*. She also seems to have some weird vision problem: she wears glasses.

I'm really starting to enjoy living here.

The media is having lots of fun with the Cheng affair. Surprisingly, this is the first time there has been a serious infraction of the UNSA policies regarding children born in limited ecologies beyond cislunar space. On the Moon or any Earth orbit they'd just be deported back to Earth. (I don't count, since I came before the laws were in place; because of me, in fact). I'm a little anxious to see how this turns out.

■

• February 4

Mars Surface, Mons Pavonis Station.

We just got word from the folks upstairs on the UNSA ruling on the Cheng baby. Apparently some martinets back on Earth have ruled that either the fetus is aborted or the Chengs shell out an unspecified but probably large amount of money.

Hot on the news announcement's heels came a top priority letter from David, [filed under date and sender]. He sent his love, and said that he's been monitoring this situation back in cislunar. Anyway, he says, "ruled" is not the proper term, more like a "forceful suggestion." From what he says, they can't put up a hard and fast ruling on something this significant very quickly, so what they did was issue this vague statement to the above effect. They want to get this settled quickly before risking the wrath of the anti-abortion groups. In short, they're making a threat they may or may not be able to back up.

Frankly, I'm a little irked. Not only is this a big issue, but a potential life is at stake here. The Chengs aren't rich; they lost a lot of money in biotech futures. They may or may not be able to pay. So their life is a mess while terrestrials back on Earth are mucking about with the political considerations and the fetus is closing in on being a baby. I know it's a bit irrational of me, but I don't get anywhere near the qualms about an abortion at up to four or five weeks that I do at two months or more. The thing that really bugs me is that I can't go down to the agriculture section and kill a few chickens to

relieve frustration and make tomorrow's lunch.

I'm so worked up I didn't write anything about being on a maintenance team. Every few months, all the rovers and planes head to one location for the regular maintenance. Deimos sends a team down to give them all a tune up, and my number came up. I've set foot on my fourth planetary body today (Earth, Moon, Deimos, Mars). Mars is beautiful in a strange way, pale pink sky with moons flitting across it, crumbly red regolith (not soil). Sort of a cross between the Moon and a bleaker part of Earth. I'm looking forward to the sunset, which is really spectacular.

• *February 5*

Mons Pavonis Station, Mars surface.

The team is being pulled up from the surface ahead of time. Very little explanation why. Something vague about solar flare forecasts. Me, I don't buy it. I can smell politics inside a p-suit with fifty meters of hard vacuum in between. Nowadays, anyway. There's something afoot here.

• *February 6*

Deimos Station, Mars Orbital.

Our lander just gets in off the tether and Commander Hofstanner calls li'l ol' me to his office. What for, as if I didn't know. Fortunately, he was cultured about it when he explained it to me...

"The Dawn Theria I remember was a teething baby girl with a flock of doctors watching her every move." Hofstanner said. "I was aboard Mir-2 when you were visiting us. It was quite a privilege. I also recall that Dr. Madja Promatov was expectant herself."

Dawn partially unclipped her hair from her barrette, releasing it from the freefall double hold to hang slightly below her shoulders. Her pride demanded she wear her hair long. "Well, it's been a lot of years, and a lot of things have changed."

"Drink?" he asked.

"Ocha, please," Dawn answered.

Hofstanner fixed a cup of Japanese tea from his private machine, added a cup of strong Russian blend for himself and settled down. "Ms. Theria, I'm asking you a personal favour. In light of events a few years ago, I can understand if you don't accept this, but I'm still going to ask.

"I've decided to call a referendum on the Cheng baby, among the Survey and the employees of PhobosCorp. I do this occasionally on items of policy that do not have a clear cut answer readily apparent. When a referendum is needed, I appoint pitch boards who prepare

legal briefs for or against the item in question. They recite their briefs, with equal time, and are then the votes are tallied. I have already appointed the board for the side in favour of having the Cheng baby aborted."

"And you want me to head up the pro side." Dawn said, in a wary voice.

"Yes. Ms. Theria, I know of your past— er—"

"Association," she supplied, tight lipped.

"—association with the Orbital Confederation. That still doesn't diminish the fact that you are one of the best public speakers alive. If you give your opinion on this issue, a lot of weight will swing behind it."

"FCBIS," she said.

"Pardon?"

"First Child Born In Space. Might as well have it tattooed on my forehead. It's all people ever see. You know, for five years I was a figurehead of a revolutionary government, and I nearly got killed when I escaped. I'm ashamed of it, and I don't want to do it anymore. I'm retired from the cult figure business. That's one of the reasons I came out here, to prove I could do things besides tell people what to think."

Hofstanner said "You don't have to convince me. Your performance has been exceptional since you arrived, and your work on the cyclor coming out here was the same. I want— I would like you to handle this. You're the one who's been thundering to let the Chengs be."

What gives you the right to dump this on me? she thought. If she spoke, the balance would swing. That was an iron certainty to her, born out by long experience with speaking to the masses.

Drunk on the adoration and fame, she had been instrumental in the Rebellion that had united the national, private and corporate space colonies into the elitist Orbital Confederation, that had sought to bring the whole Earth under its subtle control. The six months of chaos and worldwide mayhem called the Orbital War had ended that, putting space back into reach of Earthly nations.

"I— I'll have to think about it," she said, at last.

■

...I should have gone and told Hofstanner to get someone else. I waited in the hall for a while, thinking. Mostly about the Chengs and the baby, and myself. Then I went off and started work.

■

• February 7

Deimos Station, Mars Orbital.

I did a little covert monitoring of the opposition. They've got an actual staff, four people, and they've staked out one of the rec rooms

as their headquarters.

I was considering my options over lunch in the cafeteria when aid came from an unexpected source. Shiko, in a totally unexpected fit of self-confidence, said she'd help me (we're now on first-name basis). We went back to our room and put our terminal through its paces. I thought I knew data retrieval, but Shiko left me in the dust. Fifteen minutes of work, and she brought up all kinds of interesting stuff. Really synergistic working together, my firsthand knowledge of this issue and Shiko's skills with library nets.

Before I was born on Anvil station, all mixed-gender missions went by the unspoken rule: *Don't mess around!* They couldn't, anyway; insufficient privacy. (I lightened things up by telling Shiko dirty space jokes. Remember "The Russians did it first!" "Rendezvous and docking?" Note: do I still have that copy of Astra Sutra lying around?)

After me, everybody knew it could be done, but they still waited to see if the freefall or cosmic rays would do anything to me (it did, and I'm proud of it). I turned out healthy, and Serge arrived, then Haro and Pierre and Diana, and so forth. Spaceborns were the exception, instead of the rule, until the habitats were built.

Yawn — better get back to work.

• *February 8*

Deimos Station, Mars Orbital.

Just a quick note over lunch. Things are at fever pitch. The media back home have blown this whole debate way out of proportion, and what amounts to the press out here is in full force. Shiko is amazing; I don't think she slept at all last night. (She told me a saying they have in Japanese schools when studying for these really murderous exams: "Pass with four, fail with five." That's referring to hours of sleep per night!)

I wish David were here. This is exactly the kind of thing he could sink his teeth into. On the other hand, I think it's better that I'm handling this without him. After all, doing things on my own is what I came out here for.

I just had an idea. I've got to go and make a few calls back to Earth.

• *February 9*

Deimos Station, Mars Orbital.

I woke up to find a set of note cards and an outline waiting for me. Shiko followed me around quizzing me on various points (obviously an old hand at this). She even had a clear plastic wrap for the quiz sheet so she could follow me into the shower.

Cleaned and fortified with a quick breakfast, we headed for the gym. It was packed to capacity, and some monitors had been set up so that people who couldn't make it could watch.

After flipping a coin to see who went first (and the usual delay in finding the coin; some people just don't understand spin-gee), the Con side made their pitch. They cited the only-recently instituted population laws on Earth, the responsibility of people to their society, especially in a constrained, dangerous environment like this one, and the folly of bringing children willy-nilly into the world.

I was listening with half an ear while scribbling a note to the Chungs, explaining how the International Society of Spaceborns would be willing to aid them in paying the fine if necessary. (Looks like Serge's excuse for an expense account is of some use after all.) Shiko managed to get it to them.

The opposition finished. Hofstanner asked the Pro side if they wished a rebuttal. I asked if I could proceed with my statement. I know it was risky, but I'm better at speeches than debates.

I'm putting the video on record, but I'll record the high points here for convenience.

"...it is not my intent to attack my opponents' speech. I could also list several faults in UNSA policy regarding this issue, but that is not my objective either.

"Instead, it was to make an appeal to you, all of you, whoever may be watching this, to please listen, and think about what I have to say.

"Twenty-five years ago, Bannister and Lauren Theria had to make a decision that a lot of parents have had to make: whether to have a particular child or not. In that case, it was me. There were many fears regarding the Theria pregnancy, that the freefall or the cosmic rays or the air mix or any other environmental factor would affect me.

"There were fears of atrophied limbs, heart illnesses, retardation, immunological disorders. Yet they decided to have me. They could have gone to Earth to have their baby, but they didn't. Why?

(I know damn well why, but I'm saving that for my memoirs or something.)

"Because Bannister and Lauren Theria knew that some day, much sooner than was thought back then, people would be living in space. Not just working or exploring or mining or studying, but living, which means families and children. They knew that somebody would have to be the first, and they were brave enough, and dedicated enough to risk it.

"To some of you, that might seem a foolhardy gamble, risking a human life. Back then, all space exploration had some risk to human life. Besides, I cannot fault their judgement. I am thankful that my parents took that risk, and created me. Not somebody else, but me,

and in space, proving that it was safe and even beneficial in some ways to be born in space. I would not change it.

"...for that reason, I ask you to allow the Chengs to have their child. Humanity is spreading out across the Solar System. Before long, Mars will boast its own colonies, then the Belt, Jupiter, the comets. But here and now, we must decide on this issue. Children will be born here, there is no stopping it. This child is merely the first.

"Thank you."

■

• *February 12*

Deimos station, Mars orbital.

Well, it's over and done with. The votes have been calculated, but Hofstanner is withholding the results until another referendum back at cislunar is completed.

David sent word that UNSA would try and save face and go with the results, although they're still getting heat from the "Humanity Council." Can't have too many unwashed subhuman mutated heathens gallivanting around the solar system now, can we? To think there are still people like that in this day and age, racial purity and crap like that, not worth radiation shielding.

■

"...you want to know the real story, right?" Dawn asked.

Shiko nodded, taking off her glasses and cleaning them with the tail of her T-shirt. Gotta do something about those clunky black frames. She'd look much better in wires, Dawn thought, as she settled back onto her bunk.

"It all started when Dad invented a cheap, room temperature superconductor, which started the Space Boom, since superconductors can only be made in freefall. Since NASA was busy with the Mars missions, et cetera, the government put out a contract to General Technologies. GenTech cobbled together this little cheapjack space shack and called it Anvil, and ran it as a materials lab and superconductor factory.

"Dad had married Mom, who happened to be a fairly decent general physician, a few years earlier. They were set up with him as Head of Research and her as Chief Surgeon. Now, one thing I want you to know: Dad was no visionary. To be frank, he was a highly unambitious metallurgist who had had nothing to do with space beforehand. Same goes for Mom.

"I was conceived just after the Final War ended, my folks presumably relieved that they weren't going to be killed by Pan-Arab killer satellites. What really bothers me is that, in some ways, I'm the result of a long string of mistakes. Mom and Dad kept the pregnancy a secret too long. When they finally did announce it, GenTech waffled

over getting medical confirmation, then over bringing Mom down to Earth. It took about three months before my folks and Uncle Craig — Craig Jaller, you know — realized that GenTech was stalling; they deliberately wanted me to be born up here. They started asking around for some other way to get down to Earth. Problem was, nobody had room in their launch schedule, at least not for a mission that might not even be needed. You realize, back then astro-obstetrics was a big mystery, because it had been proxmired a ways back. Rats turned out okay, but no one had ever done experiments with any higher animals, like primates.

"At 18 weeks, GenTech was frantic to keep Mom and me up there. They only sent up one-way boosters, which the Anvil crew hacked up for radiation shielding to protect me. At 24 weeks, UNSA took a stand and ordered GenTech to get me down. At 26 weeks, Mom was transferred to Freedom station. She— we didn't go back to Earth. They were worried that reentry or Earth-gee might harm me.

"At 39 weeks, 3 days, Dr. Lauren Theria gave birth to a floating 3.2 kilo baby girl. I was a lab animal for my first year of life; all my baby pictures have me with electrodes or something attached. I'm probably the most closely examined individual in history. I was bounced around from station to station until I was one and a half, then I went to Earth. By the way, Serge Promatov was conceived well after I was delivered, and his parents were volunteers.

"You know, the first time I saw Earth, from the surface, I sat down and cried."

"Where was it?" Shiko asked.

"Heathrow International."

Shiko snickered, then dissolved into barely suppressed laughter, her hand over her mouth.

"What's so funny?"

Shiko giggled. "*Kawaiso!* Poor girl, first time you visit Earth and it's Heathrow airport."

Dawn chuckled herself and said, "Yeah, not exactly a good first impression. Anyway..." She let the word trail off, not certain where to go. So much had happened since then.

"Are you unhappy about it?" Shiko asked.

"No, I can't say that I am. The circumstances of your birth is the one thing you can't change. Besides, somebody had to be first, and it was me. I know I could have been killed or crippled or retarded or God knows what, but Mom and Dad weren't being irresponsible. It wasn't their idea, and they tried their hardest to get me to Earth."

"Ah. Birth is always painful." Shiko said it seriously, but then tried to cover it with a fortune cookie bow. "But— uh, your speech. All your speeches. What about them?"

"Ah, you're wondering how I can say things like that when my

own life was so cynical." Dawn leaned forward, resting her chin lightly on her knee. "Let me tell you something. I believe too much. I believed in the Orbital Confederation, so I believed in lies, and I made other people believe in lies. I may have lied in the past, but what I say now is the truth. And if I believe in it, the people who listen to me, they believe. I believe despite it all, because I want it to be true, and sometimes it is."

• *February 13*

Deimos Station, Mars Orbital.

The Chengs can have their baby!! The referendum carried at four to one and a half, and that swung opinion enough to put a ruling through. UNSA greatly reduced its fine, bringing it to an amount the Chengs or I could have paid easily. The ISS paid the bill, having managed to pull together enough contributions. UNSA is changing its policies after this, according to the press. The Chengs thanked me profusely, and promised to make me the Chinese equivalent of a godmother (that makes forty-three godsons and daughters to my name.)

David sent me a long letter, congratulating and complimenting me on my performance. (The Dawn Theria Charm swings the world's heart once again.) He also says he may be visiting in a few months, something about a long range military mission.

When he gets here, I know one thing we'll talk about: making babies. I've made up my mind to have kids, risks or not, earthborn father or not. Not now, and not until I've done some more things, but some day.

Boy: Alexander. Girl: Zara. ☾



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Sea Maiden

by Keynyn Brysse

illustration by Terry Poitras

*Y*ou've led such an exciting life, Captain Ford," declared Ellen with great admiration. "It's hard to believe so many adventures could happen to one man."

Captain Adam Ford smiled with almost child-like pride.

His blue eyes, still strong and clear in a face softened and wrinkled with age, glowed from the praise.

"I reckon by the time a body gets as old as I am, they've had plenty of experiences, Mrs. Barry," he said modestly.

"Please, call me Ellen," the young woman said quickly.

"Ellen," the Captain agreed, nodding his head, "...t'ain't often I get a chance to run my mouth like this. 'Fraid it comes hard to shut up once I start yappin'."

"Not to worry, Captain Ford," Ellen assured him, clasping one brown, wrinkled hand. "I've never spent a more entertaining evening. I'm afraid we will have to go soon," she sighed regretfully, "but we have time for one last story... don't we, George?"

This last was directed to Ellen's husband, who sat stiffly in the armchair closest to the fireplace. He paused for a moment, considering. Obviously Ellen found the old man's yarns interesting. George decided he'd rather sit through another tall tale than have Ellen sulk all the way home.

"We can stay a little longer," he conceded, settling back in the chair and assuming an air of polite interest.

"I'm sure I don't know what else you can possibly tell us," Ellen said a little too brightly, with a glance at her husband. "I can't think of anything stranger than when you were shipwrecked in the Caribbean."

The Captain looked at Ellen for a long moment. She was a pretty young woman, with pale skin and light hair. Her eyes looked very green in the firelight. A gentle breeze, fresh with the smell of dusk



and the salty ocean, drifted through the open window. The wind played lightly over Ellen's hair, and she turned her face towards it. For a moment, Captain Ford saw not Ellen, but a young woman very much like her — a beautiful girl with golden hair and eyes as green as the sea. Memories, as fresh as the smell of the ocean in his nostrils, overwhelmed him.

"There's only one tale of my life as can top that one," the Captain said slowly. "Mayhap I'm the only one in Merrow Cove that still remembers this tale. I reckon I'm the only person you'd find who'd tell it to you, anyhow. People don't like to think much on things they jest can't understand — it scares 'em.

"There's bin some strange things seen around these parts since they was first settled... Merrow Cove was rightly named, I say—"

"Surely you don't expect me to believe there are mermaids in the Cove!" George interrupted scornfully.

"I don't expect nothing from you, Mr. Barry," Captain Ford said evenly. "Jest hear me out and then see what you believe."

"Please go on," Ellen urged with a rigid smile.

"I'll tell you plain, Ellen, I never told anyone the story of Meredith Brooke afore, an' I hadn't any idear of tellin' it to you when you first got here. But you put me in mind of her, jest now... and you said you love the sea."

"And so I do," smiled Ellen. "I've always wanted to live in a place like Merrow Cove, where I could be near the ocean, but..." She trailed off, glancing at her husband.

"Meredith Brooke loved the sea," the Captain continued after a slight pause. "Even as a little girl, when us children was all playing in the fields, she'd go off by herself, to the shore. She always sorter stood apart from the rest... not 'cause she wanted to be different, you understand. Meredith jest was different. I 'member one of the other girls asking her one day how come she wanted to play alone all the time. She said, 'I'm not alone. I play with the sea people.' The other young'uns teased her something awful 'bout that... I did too, I'm ashamed to say... and she drifted even further away from us.

"We all sorter kept away from Meredith then, and she was happy enough without us, I reckon. But things changed when we all got older. When we was around sixteen, us boys started taking interest in the girls — and weren't none of 'em could hold a candle to Meredith Brooke. She was the fairest creature ever born, I'm sure. She had hair as yaller as the sun shinin' on the water, an' it fell clear to her knees in glossy waves. Her eyes was green, jest like yours, Ellen, only more so; they glowed jest like emeralds. She had the whitest skin I ever seen, and the fairest figure as well. All us boys was in love with Meredith Brooke, so we tried to get to know her.

"I 'member we all used to go sailing in Hiram Bent's boat. We

spent the whole day out on the water. Meredith dint come all the time, but she did come sometimes, since all us boys ast her, an' one time when she was there, we hit a thunderstorm late in the afternoon. The boat got tossed around some, but we all caught hold of sumthin' and managed to stay on — 'cept Meredith. She always set right up in the rail, so's she could look down into the water, an' when this storm come up an' the boat started rocking, she got tossed right over the side."

"Foolish girl!" George snorted. "It was her own fault she fell off."

"I don't rightly know as she fell off," Captain Ford said thoughtfully. "I caught sight of her as she went over, and it looked to me as how she jumped."

"You don't mean she tried to drown herself..." George said.

"I don't mean nothing," said the Captain emphatically. He was getting tired of Georges' skeptical interruptions. "I'm jest tellin' you what I saw.

"Most of us fellers jumped in after, but we couldn't find her. We all swum around for 'most an hour, but 'twernt no use. Meredith jest plain wasn't there."

"Women wore very heavy dresses back in those days," George argued. "She probably sank straight to the bottom."

"We dove down as far's we could, Mr. Barry," the Captain said.

"And you didn't see anything?" George asked incredulously. "Not even a trail of bubbles?"

"Well... I saw something," Captain Ford admitted, almost reluctantly.

"What?" asked Ellen breathlessly, leaning forward on the couch.

"I couldn't see it clearly," the Captain said. "Sun was setting by that time. I saw a tail fin, and I thought for a minute it was a shark. Scared me near to death, I reckon. But it weren't no shark. It had arms an' a head jest like a man. I believed then, an' I believe still, that on that day, I saw a merman."

George held his tongue, for once, but it was evident from his derisive snort how much trust he put in Captain Ford's eyesight.

Ellen, also, said nothing, but she looked at the Captain intently, and with understanding... as if she had once seen the same thing.

"Eventually," continued Captain Ford, "we hadda give up looking for Meredith an' headed back to shore. Folks made a bit of a fuss over it, but mebbe not as much as they would if it'd been anyone else but Meredith."

Here Captain Ford had to pause for a long coughing spell. It was the worst one yet since he had begun talking to the Barrys, and Ellen realized guiltily that the old man wasn't used to long visits. Retelling the adventures of his youth had revitalized him somewhat, but in this

moment it was apparent how frail his body was, and how the strain of talking exhausted him. She opened her mouth to apologize for taking up so much of his time, but hesitated. The Captain's tale was so compelling: Ellen had to hear the rest.

"Is that it?" George interjected loudly, interrupting Ellen's musings and the Captain's wheezing.

"No," Captain Ford said, as soon as he was able to continue. "No, Mr. Barry, that ain't the half of it.

"I was walkin' along the beach next morning, kinda trying to realize what happened, when I saw something white lying on the sand. I couldn't tell what it was, so far off, but I could see it weren't no fish. So I went over fer a closer look...an' it was her."

"Her body, you mean." This was not a question; George was confident that he was in the right.

"That's what I thought at first," the Captain admitted, "though how she coulda washed up at Merrow Cove I couldn't figure — way the currents run in this part of the Pacific, she oughta come up on the beach in Haven, or Southpoint, even. Anyhow, I was jest about to run up to town and have Charlie Proctor bring down a stretcher or something... when she rolled over."

Ellen exclaimed wordlessly in surprise and delight, clasping her hands together. Neither man heard her, however, as Mr. Barry was expressing, once again, his disbelief in the Captain's story.

"You were far from shore; there was a severe storm, and Meredith was just a girl." George pronounced this whole statement in a tone of derision, but added a dismissive flick of his hand as he spoke the word 'girl.' "There's no way she could have swum all the way back."

For once, Captain Ford was in complete agreement with the pompous young man.

"That's jest so, Mr. Barry. I can't see how she coulda done it m'self. But maybe she dint."

George folded his arms over his chest and waited. Ellen brushed a lock of hair from her cheek, her eyes never leaving the Captain's face.

"When Meredith rolled over, I saw she was holding something in her hand, real tight, like it was important. I hunkered down in the sand beside her and ast if she was alright, but she dint say nothing. She had a sorter dreamy look on her... I figgered she was in shock or something. So I helped her up and walked her home. She dint say nuthin' the whole time — jest looked at that little white thing and held it tight."

"What was it?" Ellen whispered.

Captain Ford looked at her, for a moment, then glanced at her husband. Fingering the thin gold chain that hung around his neck, the Captain lifted himself from the sofa and hobbled over to the chest

in the corner of the room. As George and Ellen watched, he with bored contempt, she with rapt attention, the old man opened the chest with the key which hung on the gold chain, and gently lifted something out. The object was wrapped in several layers of cloth; Captain Ford unwrapped it as he made his way back to the couch, his gnarled hands caressing its smooth surface.

Slowly — as if he did not want to let go — Captain Ford placed Meredith Brooke's treasure in Ellen Barry's outstretched hands.

Ellen turned it over in her hands wonderingly. It was a figurine, made of mother-of-pearl. The delicate sculpture was in the shape of a man. He had a strong, handsome face and a broad, muscular chest, but his lower body was that of a fish. Ellen fingered the tiny scales and graceful tail fin, which glowed iridescently in the firelight.

George snapped his fingers impatiently, reaching over the coffee table. He plucked the merman out of his wife's grasp and inspected it under the end lamp, as if checking for hidden flaws.

"Is it real mother-of-pearl?"

"It surely is," the Captain responded evenly.

George whistled, looking impressed for the first time. "This would probably sell for a couple hundred dollars, back in the city."

Neither Ellen nor Captain Ford spoke. After a moment, George set the figurine on the coffee table and sat back, glancing pointedly at his watch.

"Nothing much happened after that," the Captain continued, turning towards Ellen. "Meredith wouldn't tell anyone where she got that pretty little trinket, and she never explained how she dint get drowned, neither. She used to sit in her room for hours jest holding that thing, with a far-off look in her eyes..." The old man trailed off here, and then continued almost bitterly. "Of course, I never saw her doing that — I reckon of all the townsfolk, I knew her best, but even I couldn't get close enough to be invited in. Meredith dint let anyone in..."

"It was her father, staying out all night at the inn drinking, that talked 'bout how if she wasn't playing with that durn statue, she was out on the beach all the time. He'd say he never could ken what she was doing out there, that took till sundown and so's she come home soaking wet, with kelp in her hair, an' a look on her face that fair took your breath away.

"I think sometimes things mighta gone on like that forever, if it hadn't a been fer Meredith's father. Folks said what happened was real tragic, but I reckon her life woulda been a lot more tragic if she kept on like she was, living someplace she dint belong, her heart always somewheres else."

Captain Ford fell silent, memories of love and pain etched clearly on his weathered face. Ellen watched in mute sympathy. After a

moment, he went on.

"John Brooke wanted Meredith to get married. He said he dint have no use fer a lazy daughter... but I think the real reason is she kinda made him edgy. There's a lotta things about Meredith that he — an' all the rest of us too — jest plain dint understand, and like I already said, that makes folks mighty nervous.

"But Meredith hadda pretty face, and she was a good woman, so there was plenty of offers. But she wouldn't take none of 'em. At first John Brooke jest figgered she was being choosy, but months passed, and he got real riled up. She never spoke to anyone, for fear they'd ask the question, an' then what would she do? She couldn't say no, 'cause of her father, but she couldn't say yes, neither. That was plain to everyone who jest took one look at her, but at the time, no one could figger why."

Ellen studied the Captain's face, reading the sorrow and regret there. "You asked her, didn't you?" she said gently.

"Aye." Captain Ford took a deep breath, swiping at his eyes with one trembling hand. "I ast Meredith Brooke to marry me, and her father made her say yes. I guess you could say that was the happiest day of my life... but it was a false happiness, and I knew it. Anyone could see it was breaking poor Meredith's heart to git married — I knew it even before I ast her — but I had to. I loved Meredith Brooke. I still do. *Lord—!* There's not a day the last seventy years and more I hain't thought of her, and wished there was some way she coulda been happy with me. But it was jest never meant to be. Her heart belonged to someone else. All those years, and no one ever knew..."

Ellen expected George to interrupt here, demanding to know exactly what Captain Ford meant, and wished fervently that she had made this trip to Merrow Cove alone. But George, who had either fallen asleep or was simply too bored to argue any further, remained silent.

"The night before the wedding, there was a thunderstorm, jest like the one when we all thought Meredith drowned... nearly a year before. I went over to see Meredith... make sure she hadn't changed her mind, I guess, 'cause I felt sorter uneasy 'bout the whole thing... an' her folks said she went for a walk. It being Meredith, I figured she went to the ocean, so I struck out for the palisades, which is on the west end of the Brooke's land. I come aroun' that big boulder there—" the Captain waved his right hand over the coffee table, presumably in the direction of the boulder, "—and there she was, soaked to the skin and her hair flying in the wind. She was standing right on the edge of the cliff, looking out at the sea, and all of a sudden... a presentiment, I guess you call it, though I never believed in all that gobbledygook... anyhow, I jest panicked. I called her name, and she turned around. ...Lord, the look on her face!"

Captain Ford closed his eyes, putting a hand to his furrowed brow, and continued softly; "Meredith was crying. Her face was wet from the rain, but I could tell jest the same. Her soul was crying... for something no one on the earth could give her. She held out her hands to me, like she was begging me to understand, and I seen she was holding that little statue. Meredith looked at me, and she set it on the ground, in front of me.

"And then, she turned her back, and jumped off the cliff."

There was silence for a long moment; Captain Ford was lost in the bittersweet memories of his youth. Ellen sat as motionless as the figurine on the coffee table. A tear rolled slowly down her cheek, yet she was smiling. George started awake in the armchair.

"Is that it?" he yawned, not for the first time that evening. He received no answer, but there was a feeling in the air of finality; the journey into the past had ended, and the present was slowly creeping back into the cozy little room.

The Captain's last tale was over.

■

"I bet it's that figurine," George said excitedly, turning off the ignition and climbing out of the car. "It's the only thing he had that was worth anything."

"Maybe," Ellen replied guardedly. "The executor didn't give any details." Ellen, too, hoped that Captain Ford had bequeathed the mysterious merman to her, but she did not want to sell it.

It was hard to believe that the crusty old sea captain was dead. Ellen wanted to keep the figurine to remind her of him... and of Meredith Brooke.

The executor, Mr. Hanks, met them at the door of the late captain's cottage.

"I'm afraid we'll have to make this quick," he said as he unlocked the door and ushered the Barrys inside. "I've got a long ride home, and it's late already."

"No problem," George answered impatiently. "We weren't going to stay long anyway."

"This is it right here, Mrs. Barry." Mr. Hanks picked up one of the boxes on the coffee table and handed it to Ellen. "I'm sorry, but I really must go now."

Ellen carried the box outside, fingering the lid. She wanted to open the box alone. She wanted to hold the beautiful figurine — if that's what it was — just as Meredith Brooke once held it... without George peering over her shoulder and ruminating loudly and incessantly about its value. A younger, much more uncertain Ellen had once appreciated George's parsimonious nature, but this quality had since been overshadowed by his lack of love and compassion, which Ellen felt more and more acutely each time she thought of Meredith's

eventual freedom.

"I'm going to take a walk," she said when George stepped out onto the porch.

"What?" George asked. "What in hell for?"

"I'll only be a few minutes," Ellen insisted.

"Fine, fine! I'll wait in the car. But make it quick — I have to work tomorrow." George turned on his heel, heading for the car.

Ellen walked around the cottage, heading for the sea. It took her only a moment to reach the shore; once there, she stood silently for a few minutes, taking in the beauty of it. The sun was sinking slowly into the ocean, brilliant gold a sharp contrast to deep azure. Ellen climbed up onto a boulder overhanging the water, where she could see the whole majestic panorama, and hear the secret and timeless whispering of the waves.

Ellen opened the box, revealing the delicate figurine. She lifted it out, cradling it gently. The fading sunlight shone on the little merman. There was something else in the box: a folded piece of paper. Ellen held it up in the dying light, and read the quotation printed shakily upon it:

*"If the soul is pure, and the heart is sure
Love, in the deepest sea, will endure."*

A horn honked loudly from the hill beyond the beach. Startled, Ellen jumped. The paper flew out of her fingers and fluttered down into the water. Ellen leaned over the edge of the boulder, reaching towards the surface... and, far below, saw a flash of gold, and the graceful curve of a green-scaled tail.

Ellen stared into the water, mesmerized. A second silhouette joined the first. The two figures merged into one, and Ellen's heart ached for the joy and love of that passionate embrace.

George honked again; two sharp impatient blasts. Ellen kissed the beautiful figurine and let it slide from her fingers into the sea. Then she stood gracefully, and stepped off the boulder into a new world, and a new life. 🐡

New 1991 ON SPEC Deadlines!

Please note our new submission deadlines:

- **MAY 31** for the Fall 1991 Issue
- **JUNE 30** for the Special Issue (1991 - Humour)
- **NOV. 30** for the Spring 1992 Issue

2,000 Year Check-up

by Cory Doctorow

illustration by Jason Queck

The first things I noticed when I walked into his house were the bells. They were everywhere. The door shut with a glassy tinkle, the walls hung with jingle-tipped macrame. A gong, made from a hubcap, strips of metal and a meat tenderizer, hung on a stand in the centre of his living room.

"Hey man, just walk in. I'll be around." I had taken this advice to heart and, upon determining which townhouse was his, I just turned the doorknob. The bells, as I noted, tinkled. I couldn't see him anywhere. I shook a wall hanging. The bells jingled.

"Hello?" No reply. The thirsty green ferns sopped up the sound, moistly stealing it from the air. I took a quick look around. Bells. Plants. Some Peter Tosh posters, bundles of bright wire in tight knots. The windows were painted brightly, with watercolours. The stained glass art they formed was intricate, a gaudy collage of drug images and autohypnotic spirals.

I grabbed up the meat tenderizer and banged the gong. The bits of steel hung around it vibrated with the sound. A door slid aside and he walked in.

"Good day, man." His head tottered on his neck; his long legs took funky-chicken strides over the clutter on the floor. One wiry arm stuck itself out, near my belly. I clasped it awkwardly with my left hand. He languidly raised and lowered his arm, taking mine with it.

"Mr. Kane?" I asked. His head dipped. "I'm John Stewart. We spoke earlier, on the phone?"

Again his neck bent. "Yeah, man. Whassup? You got a prob-



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lem, right?" He took an empty beer bottle from the coffee table, where a ring of sticky dust had formed. He stuck his eye up to the business end and looked at me through the brown glass.

"Oh yeah. You got it bad." He dug around in the pocket of his lumber jacket and produced half of a channel-changer, hooked up to a telephone receiver. He cradled the receiver between his ear and his shoulder, and punched rapid sequences into the convertor.

"What are you doing?"

His watery grey eyes narrowed. He pursed his lips. Clearly, he was doing something important, and I'd better not interrupt. He waved a pair of fuzzy dice over my head.

"You gotcherself a problem, guy. You still living in the middle ages. I look into your head with this sophisticated aura-detector, and I see visions of unspoiled pastures; green, raw grass; yellow sun; pen and ink. You wish for a world that we buried. You don't like concrete, man! How much tube do you catch a day?"

"I don't have a TV. I sold mine the day after *The Andy Griffith Show* went off the air."

His eyes snapped open, and he folded in at the knees, flabbergasted.

"No, tube? Oh, man, you got it *bad!* You need some shock treatment." He pulled out a blue-and-white package, and showed me the cover. Player's Raunchy Cut. He offered me one. I shook my head. He shrugged, pulled out two, lit them both and stuck one between my lips. Startled, I inhaled. A cloud of purple smoke filled my head, choking my brain.

"It's a damn good thing you come to me when you did. Another week, maybe two, and you find yourself so unhappy, you throw yourself offa fuckin' *bridge*, man."

The smoke was getting to me. The colours in the room bruised, took on a grey tinge that matched his eyes.

"Now, about payment—"

He shushed me. "We talk pay later, man. Right now, we gotta get intense." His arm snaked out again, and grabbed my shoulder. He marched me into the adjoining room. A TV sat atop a bar fridge; a stereo winked a thousand L.E.D.'s at me.

"Have a seat, man."

I sat on a milk crate. He opened the fridge and pulled out a silver can. Coors Lite. While I watched, he shook it violently, walked to one wall, and pulled the tab. Foam sprayed onto the wall. Slowly, he traced a circle of Coors around the room, then he dumped the dregs of the can into my hair.

"Hey!"

"Lissen, man. You gotta keep the spirits of the dead an' buried passed out somehow, right?" Then, with his leggy-stretch stride, he

traced three circles around the room, rolling his eyes in time with his chant:

"Big Mac, Filet O' Fish, Quarter Poundah-French Fries, Icy Coke, Thick Shake, Sundae-Apple Pie."

My brain began to dull; details became soft, as soft as marshmallow topping and whipped cream. Absently, I stood and flicked on the TV. There was a cop show on. A guy in a uniform turned a flame thrower on a van. It burst into flames, throwing Cuban drug-runners in all directions.

Suddenly, a wrenching! My chest spasmed, my eyes bulged, a fist squeezed my stomach.

"Holy shit!" I collapsed to the floor. The smoke from my cig rose in clouds above me. Sweat poured off my face, soaking my neck. Then, the pain was gone.

"The spirits of dead an' buried are tryin' to fight off my magic. They holdin' on with steel spikes and nylon rope. My magic, it pulls 'em away, but they hold on." He wiped my forehead with a damp cloth.

I was having trouble focussing my eyes. They burned with smoke, and ached from being squeezed shut in pain. He swivelled his head to face me and spoke, in words that dribbled from his rubbery lips.

"Why don't you relax man, watch some TV?"

I felt my legs straightening and bending, and I was sitting down once more. The cop show was over, and a Top-40 video show was on. I watched skinny, hairy men in tight pants licking the camera lens for six or seven videos. Then, slowly, I switched the channel. An evangelist tried to save my soul. I found myself dialing an 800 number and making a donation, rattling off my credit card number like nothing. Somewhere, way down inside, a voice chattered warnings. They were very easy to ignore. My host sat down next to me, handed me a can of beer and a cardboard box of greasy fried chicken. I ate without taking my eyes off the screen. Twice, my hands jerked and a little wave of pain passed through me. My host soothed me, wiping my hands with cool cloths. I noticed that he wrung out the cloths into a clear jar, and the liquid was the exact colour of a summer sky.

I lived there for two days. I remember it dimly. Endless TV shows, a few snatches of a porno movie, wedges of microwaved pizza. Lots of beer. When I left, I felt... not unhappy. Where before I had walked through my days longing for a past I had never known, I now felt as if the world around me was familiar, not worth notice. I tried to pay him, but he refused, with a little smile.

"Just tell your friends about me," he said.

I walked out to where I'd parked my car. I could have sworn it wasn't a tow-away zone when I'd parked there. I walked back to see if I could borrow his phone. I passed by the living room window.

Light flickered around the edges of the painted glass. Green light, like fresh-mown grass. I peeked in a corner. He was dancing in the centre of the room, all grace now, like a gazelle or a cat. He was anointing himself with the blue liquid he'd squeezed out of the cloths he'd wiped me with. I could smell autumn leaves, jungle vines and red blossoms. His skin was dappled with Savannah sunlight. And I knew that I had paid him.

I had just used a different, more precious coin. ☛

Prayer

Thank you, Goddess
for granting me the waking sight
of fuzzy sunlight puddles drifting
down the walls on this,
the morning when my pendulum
threatened to stand still.

I know the dawn's cold sharp steel
could slice open my papery skin
and the husk of my corncob-doll
body could flutter to the dankest
nook of my sanctuary

any morning now

there I would die

Benefactress, thank you
for thickening my flesh with the
hope
of orange juice and birdsong



By Rhonda Whittaker

Masks My

Father

Gave Me

They were
precious twins of
imitation silver and
orange gold
faces supple and curved
like a woman's body.

I could
fondle one's frown
I could
stroke the other's smile
I could
make them kiss blithely
the two expressions fit together
quite nicely...

What I could do startles me

So I hang them
symmetrically

My ideally platonic
screaming mouths. ☛



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Siege
Perilous
Folios

Mother Earth

by Christine Gertz

illustration by Tom Paquette

I was sorry the minute my elbow hit the vase and sent it twisting and gleaming toward the hardwood of the living-room floor. Then I was terrified by the pieces and all the imagined scenes of my mother's discovery that the precious vase was broken. In that fear, I hid the pieces and went to school.

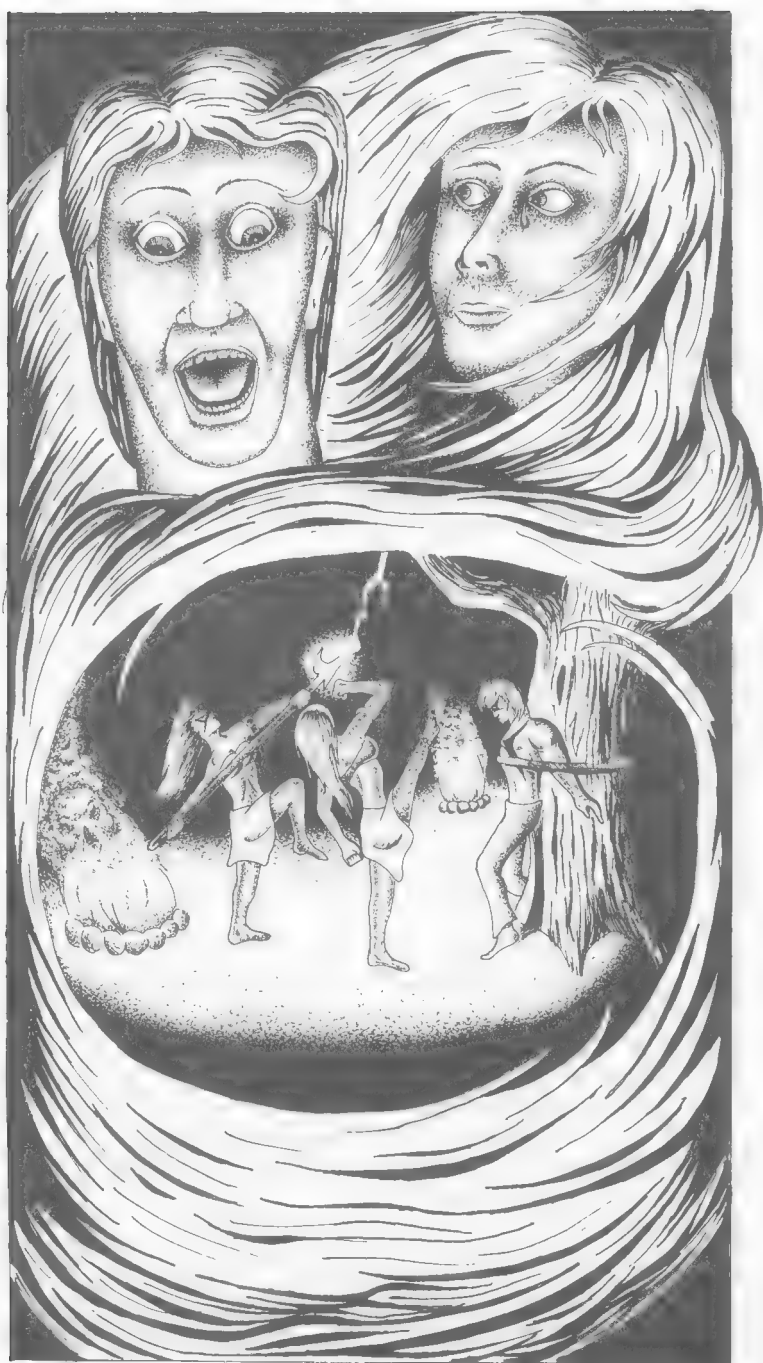
I got into my car and drove to school even though it was within walking distance of my house. Maybe twenty minutes away. Still, breaking the vase and cleaning up the pieces made me late.

On the way to school I passed a girl who probably had the same destination in mind, judging from the hefty amount of books she was carrying in her slender arms. She didn't look either way and certainly not at me. I almost expected her to for some weird reason. Both of us went on our way. Alone.

I stayed that way most of the day. Worrying about the vase, seeing it fall, and then seeing all the routes a confrontation might take when my mother discovered that it was missing. And irreparable. I couldn't get it out of my mind. Even at lunch in the mall across the street from school, I could still see it falling and knew that I could not catch it, break its fall.

I had never really noticed the woman behind the counter at the fast food stand before. I felt sorry for her working the lunch rush alone. Her face was so fine boned and drawn, her eyes so lost in the blackness that lack of sleep gives a person, that I wondered, pityingly, how anyone could let herself get that way. She probably got sick from eating the leftovers in this place, I thought, watching her hand me the greasy burger enclosed in styrofoam, along with the aluminum can full of pop. I gave her my money and walked away to find a place to eat.

That was the hard part. Almost all the seats were taken. So even though I didn't want to, I sat in non-smoking and tried not to think



about the cigarettes in my pocket. My hunger for one of them was almost as sharp as the one in my belly for food. Eating, and in reasonable comfort, took precedence.

The food was edible, barely. I took time over the pop, but I couldn't finish it. I tossed it into the trash can, along with all the other garbage. It was brimming, overflowing with pop cans, cellophane, mangled newspapers, and glass bottles. As I saw the pop can fall, I thought of the vase, shattering into hundreds of glistening shards all over the floor of my living room. I finally thrust that image out of my mind.

Walking out of the food fair, I passed by the pleading sign of the recycle bin. I barely glanced at it and walked on by. The slender girl I had passed on the way to school was putting her glass pop bottle into the empty bin.

So that was lunch, and when that was over, I attended my last class of the day and went home. Only within a few minutes of home, the car simply died on me. I tested the engine several times. Nothing. Went out and checked under the hood, ignoring the guy in his car behind me who was yelling insults. From under the car hood I stuck out my hand and gave him the finger. Honking on by, he returned the favour.

I couldn't see anything wrong with the car. Maybe I was just too angry to think straight, and everything was swimming in front of my eyes in a watery haze. When I straightened up from under the hood, I slammed my palm down on the hood and closed it with a metallic smack. That was when I noted that on this normally busy road there was no one else walking by.

Then I saw the slender girl. Or at least from a distance I thought it was her. When she approached, I went up onto the pavement to intercept her, to ask her where a phone booth was.

But this was my neighbourhood. I should have known where those things were. My eyes were getting worse; in my ears I could hear the breaking of the fragile glass of the vase. I staggered.

She caught me. With one hand on my arm she drew me up. Her grip was like a vise, and I knew in an unexpected flash that her hand was probably just as strong.

Her face was closed, pale, and drawn amongst the thickness of her cheekbones and the frame of her lacquered hair. She looked like some kind of a cheap hooker, suddenly fat, her clothes tight, making that fact more obvious. Still there was some kind of excitement in her eyes, a wildness all about her, like an aura. I almost fell under the intense concentration in her eyes.

"All men are accountable," she said.

I tried to wrench my arm away. My first assumption had been right; her grip was that of a vise.

"Do you know," she asked almost conversationally, "that a whore's unwanted children are aborted?"

I didn't struggle against that but looked straight into her eyes. They regarded my face with a searching, almost pleading look. I wondered if she was sane.

Her grip tightened in a burst of anger, almost as if she had heard my thought.

"I'll help you," she said with a ferocious gentleness. She stepped onto the grass of the neighbouring lawn, drawing me with her.

The ground went out from under my feet. I struggled for support and found only her hand on my arm. I put my free hand over it and clutched. I felt a tightening of the muscles in her clenched fingers. Almost as if in comfort.

The air was quiet. I felt myself breathe with a feeling that I had not done such an action in a century, and my body had to get used to the action again. The air was rich and pure, making me heady with the smell of blossoms and wet grass after a short rain. I touched the bruises on my arm where her hand had been. I looked up to see if she was still there.

The woman who stood before me was not the same one who had gripped my arm. Her hair was free flowing, golden, like wheat. Her eyes were green, like the leaves on trees in spring, and had a searching depth. Her cheeks were filled out and rosy with health and exertion. She smiled winningly with her full lips and straightened up from her solicitous crouch over me. She drew soft, cool fingertips over the bruises on my arm, and with a sigh, drew her fingers down my arm. She caught my hand lightly and helped me to stand.

I knew she was the same person who had confronted me on the sidewalk. The wildness was still about her like a cloak across her slim shoulders. I inched back from her in fear, but when she grinned, almost congenially, I leaned in toward her. I felt a moment of awe, the twinge of an animal instinct of fear.

She pivoted on her heel. I couldn't see the road, wondered briefly where I was. She seemed to be the only one who would have my answers. I didn't have to convince myself to follow.

We walked for a long time. She never seemed to slacken her pace or tire from it in the slightest. I had to struggle to keep up. Too many cigarettes, I thought sourly, and then had a terrible craving for one.

She paused then. Turned and looked at me shrewdly. I knew in that moment she had known exactly what I had been thinking. Perhaps had known all my thoughts from the second I had come into her line of sight.

An instant later she turned away and stepped into the sheltering arms of trees that I had not noticed before. We walked only a few paces. Then we were out of the trees and stepping into a clearing that

was lit only by the light of the moon and the licking tongues of flame from a giant bonfire. I was just opening my mouth to ask her how she had accomplished that neat little time change, when she turned and fixed her now solemn eyes upon me.

"This is my home, if I can ever lay claim to one separate home," she said, gesturing regally towards the flames. "And these are my people."

I could see the people then, dancing and twisting around the flame. One second they would be in the noxious smoke of the flame and another weaving their feet and arms intricately into the light. They had an intensity and passion in their movements, their bodies supple and sinuous with health and strength. They were speeding towards some kind of ecstatic climax. The same wildness I had felt all about her seemed to settle around them as they moved faster.

The woman was making her way around the circle of dancers. Passing through them with long, sure strides. In and out of the light, through the smoke and then...

She walked through the fire. Entered it on the opposite side from me and, after several seconds, came out to face me. There was not a mark on her. She raised her arm in a sort of benediction that seemed to enclose all of the dancers. The fire coughed once behind her and spat straight up at the sky. It fired the whole of her body with an unnatural glow but did not touch her physically.

She dropped her arm and the dancers collapsed, replete. There was no expression on her stony face, but I knew that their dancing was all for her pleasure and, at the same time, that she was very pleased.

She gestured again. Her fingertips led my eyes to a man, naked and bound to a gnarled oak tree. He did not raise his head in any sort of acknowledgement. A dancer walked towards him, took him gently by the back of his head, forcing it up. I could see all the marks on his body, white scars against the tan of his skin, small slivers of blood. Yet there was something in his face beyond immediate fear, an acceptance, an anticipation. For what? I had no idea. He allowed his head to fall when the dancer released him, but all the muscle and sinew in that waiting body was tensed with the final adrenaline of a triumphant runner before the finish-line ribbon.

I was mesmerized. There was no other way to describe the fascination that kept me from taking my eyes away. The retreating dancer picked up a long spear, buried by its head in the dirt a few feet away. She gripped it with a surety I had never seen in anyone picking up a weapon. I saw my escort, the woman with the wildness all about her, come to stand behind. As the dancer dragged back the spear, the goddess placed her hand around the thrower's. They threw the spear as one.

The man raised his head. The spear found home in his chest, and

I had never known until that instant how much blood there was in a human being.

I turned away, retching and crying out in the same instant. I felt the goddess place her wiry arms around me and felt the sun beat holes into my back. We stood alone on a small rising, devoid of growth.

I slumped in her arms. Allowed myself the comfort of her stomach beneath the skin of my face. I felt hot and clammy cold in the same instant. I thought I would throw up again. I could see the man tied to that tree, having no desire to move, taking the spear into his gut, saw again the anemone of blood blossom from his skin.

I drew away from her in a wrenching motion. She did not hold me.

"Why?" I cried, and then her arms went around me again.

"Simon," she said, her voice almost unbearably patient, "he knew his duty and was not afraid. You saw his face. Was there any fear?"

Of course, I would remember his face; the joy on it had probably been what made me cry out. How I had seen in one instant my face superimposed over his. How unafraid he had been.

"Simon, when you look, do you see the waste? The cars that drive to a destination a few blocks away? The aerosol cans? The cutting of needed trees, the waste of those, the devastation? And then the use of chemicals as they metamorphose into paper? Chemicals dumped into drinking water hurting me as much as it hurts you?"

I could see the vase falling in my mind, then watching my own hands as guiltily, I hid the fragments.

"Yes," she said. "Just so." She paused. "Those people are dead. Almost all of *my* people. Killed by the arrogance and the ignorance of a new tribe. I shall have new people, though. You are not the first. Nor shall you be the last."

I didn't want any part of what I had just seen.

"That doesn't have to be the cure!" she shouted. "If there is any cure. Do you know what you have done? Can you cure *this*?"

She was naked before my eyes. Her skin was marked, scored and bruised, ragged with welts and trails of blood. At her belly, the skin shrivelled, pulled back and blistered, fleeing all the way up and engulfing her left breast with the infection, and then moving up to swallow the skin of her face. Her hands were twisted into claws of agony, clutching at a hope that eluded her like the air. Blood began to run in rivers down her legs and stained the jaundiced skin of her thighs.

"Do you see me? This is what I am. Tell me, do you know a cure?"

I exhaled into her agony. Saw her step toward me and engulf me with her fetid arms.

"One man amongst many. You shall help fuel a new fire. One of hope. But there is only so much time."

And then she was shining and resplendent with unearthly glory.

She swirled around me, the whole of her. She almost smothered me with her wildness and the strength of her grip. Her flesh seemed to become a part of mine. She filled me with a feeling and the memory of that man upon the oak. All of his courage — for that was what it took for him not to run from fate. I knew I could break away, and with surety, did not leave her embrace.

She joined me. All through my pores, into my vitals, and singing with power into my blood. Down into the soul I never knew I had until she touched it with final tenderness.

She evaporated with the purity of morning mist touched by the sun. I was sitting with the engine purring like a luxurious cat all around my body. I went home.

My mother was waiting for me, her forehead furrowed with worry. She asked no questions. I did not speak. I went straight to my room and found the box where I had hidden the pieces of the vase. I did not say any kind of apology, because 'sorry' would not mend those pieces.

"I can work towards buying you a new one," I said quietly. ☾

The Monster is an Import to Camelot

by Rhonda Whittaker

He sought us from across the dark sea,
tall, slim, swarthy, black almond eyes;
skin stretched taut over jutting slavic bones,
like a drum...

Kissing him made a hollow percussion,
like the excerpt of a heartbeat.

(No! That is unmentionable!
His name is no talisman,
the magic congeals when — it —
is uttered.)

He adapted quickly, wore our tunics and jerkins and such.
But his scent reminded us, his cool scent... like moss...
oh, we should not have trusted the beautiful alien.

Agreed he was of noble birth, perhaps a prince.
We questioned him of his homeland
and got guttural tales of
a queer conservative Babylon
where sin abounded but was not acknowledged.

He had no weapons, but slit a woman's throat with his hands.

(We know because we saw
the blackened blood, above
the quick of his clawed thumbnail,
the next morning.)

Yet we were befuddled by his innocence, and that night,
behind the flickering fire, we requested (with respect and
suspicion) he embellish the tale of his origins.

With his right hand poised in the air he drew magic diagrams,
their luminosity reflecting as a green glow on his face.
He illuminated the strange cities and palaces with a stroke
of his long forefinger.

We sat, chilled with awe.
How our hearts tripped!
How we feared him!

Four days later thirty men and women pushed sodden handmade
boats
away from the shore of the dark sea at midnight, and were never
again
heard from.

He left with them.

No legacy, except for the body of the girl, and an infant with a
brain tumor, who has months to live.



1990

by Cairo & X

The sun is bright on the day that Soapy goes shopping for his wife. The Number Twelve bus stops in front of the Wide World of Girls Shopping Mall and Soapy, Slimy, Prince Charming and Watermelon Silver jump out. Soapy is hoping for the best.

"What sort of wife are you hoping to buy?" asks Slimy.

"My wife should be clean and smart." This is clean and smart Soapy speaking, who is as clean as surgical gloves and as smart as exactly 59.742 computers. The sun glints off his microchip teeth. Clean and smart Soapy.

They go directly to the Clean and Smart Girl Department, carefully avoiding the Frumpy and Dumpy Girl Department, turning left at the Psychopathic and Wantonly Destructive Girl Department, and completely ignoring the Scantily Clad and Disco Dancing Girl Department. The salesman of the Clean and Smart Girl Department greets them at the door.

"Good morning," he says. "How may I help you?"

"I am looking for a clean and smart wife," says Soapy.

"You might just be in luck." The salesman twirls his moustache around his finger and grins. "What else did you have in mind?"

"Hmmm," says Soapy, looking around. "I was thinking of something along the lines of clear complexion, healthy bones and teeth, goal-oriented, agreeable personality..."

"I have just the thing for you!" The salesman strides across the aisle and lifts a tall, blue-eyed girl from the top shelf. She is completely stiff, almost doll-like. "Here she is! 10888361 — physically fit, intelligent, clean and smart."

"Hello," says Soapy. "My friends call me Soapy, but you can call me Richard Henry."

"Hello," says 10888361. "I'm 10888361."

Soapy turns to the salesman. "Do you mind if I ask her a few questions?"

"By all means. I want you to know what you're buying."

"Thank you," says Soapy. He holds 10888361's hands, looks into her blue, blue eyes and asks, "Will you wash my shirts?"

"Yes," says 10888361.

"And continue your career?"

"Yes."

"And how many children do you want?"

"Two."

"Perfect," says Soapy. "I'll take her."

The salesman grins a bit too broadly. "Marvellous. What will we trade? What are your qualifications?"

"Clean fingernails, a healthy education and a promising career as a doctor."

"That's a fair exchange. Take her, she's yours." The salesman grins his too-broad grin once again. "I'll make out a receipt."

Soapy kisses 10888361's fingers and smiles.

"There's also a five-year warranty," sings the salesman as Soapy takes the paper from him.

"I hope that won't be necessary."

"Enjoy your wife!"

"Thanks!"

Slimy, Prince Charming and Watermelon Silver watch their old friend leave with his new wife. The three friends take the Number Twelve bus back.

"Gee," says Prince Charming as they seat themselves. "That must be really swell, having a wife. Imagine having something you can love, something you can take care of, something you can control."

"And those nice hot dinners when you get home from a long day of important, manly duties..." sighs Slimy.

"A wife. I think I'm going to have to get one of those. In fact, it's number one on my shopping list," Prince Charming says.

"Same here," says Slimy. "My wife will be funny and messy. She'll have to make pancakes for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and we'll have four kids."

"My wife will have beautiful eyes and beautiful hair and a beautiful voice. She'll sing to me, and I will give her flowers. We'll have seven or eight daughters and sell them all when they're young." Prince Charming looks out the window dreamily. "Maybe they'll even be good enough to get into the Romantic and Stunningly Beautiful Department."

Watermelon doesn't say anything because it is his stop. He waves goodbye to Slimy and Prince Charming and gets off the Number Twelve bus. He starts running down the road as soon as he is out in

the happy September sunshine.

It's a nice day. The leaves are blowing off the trees, the sun is cracking the sidewalks and the seagulls have no sense of decency.

Watermelon Silver walks down a long familiar back lane where he played hockey as a boy. There are usually so many boys playing there that no cars can get by. But today it is deserted. Have they found a new game? Is ball hockey out of style? Do they like chess now? Now there is an old man's game.

Watermelon Silver pulls his coat around himself and stuffs his hands in his pockets. He wishes — for a very small moment — that he has just been playing ball hockey and is going to go into Soapy's house for some lemonade. His eyes are seeing trees hanging over fences and sunlight hanging over trees, but his mind is seeing legs and arms and sticks and shoes and face masks. The legs and arms and sticks slide back and forth like a pop-up book. His mind is seeing the floating ice cubes and the red elbow-scrapes, the muddy knees and droplets on Soapy's upper lip. But there isn't anyone around anywhere.

Finally, Watermelon Silver is at his house. He is just about to proceed up the vacant driveway when he notices something. There is someone bent over the family garbage cans, going through the refuse, occasionally popping something into its mouth. Watermelon Silver can't recall this ever happening, so he shouts out:

"Hey there! There's a restaurant around the corner!"

The garbage-eating person does not hear, or pretends not to hear Watermelon Silver, so he shouts out again:

"Hey you! Save some for the alley cats!"

The garbage-eating person goes right on eating garbage.

Watermelon Silver is not used to being ignored, so he storms over to the slight figure, grabs its shoulders and turns the person to face him. In the same instant that he sees the garbage-eating person's face, he drops his hands and shrieks, "You're a girl!"

"I know," says the girl. "I also have a name."

"What are you doing out here in public?" screams Watermelon Silver. "All by yourself? They're going to get you, they're really going to get you. All I have to do is scream loud enough. What are you doing?"

"Eating your garbage," says the girl. "Do you have a name?"

"And why are you eating my garbage?"

"I get what I find. Would you like some mouldy blue salami?"

"No. What are you doing, though? Who owns you?"

"I do."

"You mean you live out here, in the alleys? What are you going to do for the rest of your life?"

"I'm going to be a lamp post. And you?"

"I— I haven't exactly decided. Lamp post?"

"Lamp post. Providing light in time of darkness, standing tall against the streets of men, but never as high as the seagulls. Lamp post. You know, you'd make a swell fire escape. Ever considered it?"

"Er— no. Fire escape?"

Right then, Watermelon Silver's mother stands out on the porch and she shouts out, "Howard! The phone's for you!"

Watermelon Silver throws his arm up in salute and runs into the house. He tracks mud onto the floor and his mother turns a little purple, but Watermelon Silver gets to the phone.

He is breathless. "Hello?"

"Hi! This is Slimy. Prince Charming and I are taking the Number Twelve bus at 8:35. We're going to buy some wives. Are you coming?"

"Well, yes, I guess."

"So be at your stop at 8:42, okay?"

"All right."

"Are you buying yours tomorrow? I think there's a sale on at the Confused and Without Direction Department."

"Er— I think I'll pass for now."

"Come on, Watermelon. We've all waited long enough. Promise you'll buy yours tomorrow. Then we'll all be married and no one will be left out."

Watermelon Silver thinks this over. "Uh," he says after a moment. "Where did you say they were having that sale?"

"Confused and Without Direction Department. Perfect for you."

"Very well," says Watermelon Silver. "See you at 8:42 tomorrow."

"I knew you'd do it! Wait until I tell Prince Charming!"

"So long," says Watermelon Silver. He hangs up the phone and dashes to the window. The garbage cans have been knocked down, but the alley is completely empty.

*

She comes at noon. The wind is blowing her dirty black hair like ribbons on a kite Watermelon Silver had as a boy. She's wearing a big sweater. Her knees are bare.

"I've given it some thought," Watermelon Silver says at last. "I'm going to become a fire escape."

"I'll be your next-door lamp post," she says. "We can spy on the neighbours."

Watermelon Silver looks up at her from his grove in the tall tall grass. "But won't it get cold in the winter?"

"We can play ball hockey."

And Watermelon Silver is seeing again. Arms, legs, sticks, shoes, face masks, nets, pavement, grass, trees, sun...

■

Soapy, Slimy, Prince Charming and their brand new wives do not

see Watermelon Silver in the tall tall grass. They do not see thousands of boys playing ball hockey because no one is playing ball hockey. They do not stop to wonder why the alley is deserted.

The wind blows gravel along down the alley as the six make their way to Watermelon Silver's house. They are a little bit curious and more than a little angry. Where is Watermelon Chicken?

"Hey, is that him?" asks Soapy.

Slimy squints through the slight dust and then opens his eyes wide and blinks. "Good hell..."

"What is it, Slime?"

"I think it's a girl..."

"You are absolutely right," says Soapy. "I think it's a free girl at that."

"Maybe, Slimy, you should take the women out front..."

*

Watermelon Silver gazes up at her for a moment. "Ball hockey? You like playing ball hockey?"

"Sure. It's great."

"Where have you played ball hockey?"

"Well I haven't... yet. But we could get a team together. You could get your friends together, and we could hang out here..."

Watermelon Silver is about to break into a grin, but he stops. The expression on his face is one of frozen horror instead. "You know," he says at last. "My three best friends just got married."

"My condolences. Well maybe their wives..."

"No, we can't play ball hockey."

"You mean, they can't play ball hockey."

"That's what I mean."

"We can play ball hockey."

They do not speak for a moment and there is also a precious silence in the battering wind's gale. Watermelon Silver is getting used to the idea of being a fire escape, and he turns the image over and over again in his mind. The immortal fire escape, used only in times of emergency...

■

Soapy weighs his conscience with a triple beam balance, and finds that he only has to use the single gram masses. He will do what he has been taught to do. He will do what is right. Soapy springs from the shadows, driving the knife into the girl's neck. There is no chance for survival. The blade has severed a major artery. Soapy throws the bloody knife at his feet, but his hands are already stained. Even doctors have to get a little dirty.

Watermelon Silver, hidden by the tall tall grass, watches a gob of black bile slide out of the corner of her mouth. He realizes that he hadn't even asked her name. ☹

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Portrait of a Psychopath

A Tale of a Not-so-quiet Evening at Home

by Jeb Gaudet

illustration by Andrea Baeza

Edmond Langley was home alone. Again. His parents were out, and the dance at school... well, nobody had asked him or accepted an invitation. Again.

So Edmund was settling in for another Friday night at home watching horror classics. Tonight's line-up was no small affair: two Hitchcock thrillers, *Dial M for Murder* and *Psycho*. After that, who knew?

He cracked open a Coke and took a mouthful of the contents. Anthony Perkins (a.k.a. Norman Bates, a.k.a. the Psycho) was showing off his collection of stuffed birds to the unsuspecting Janet Leigh (a.k.a. the victim). Edmund grinned as the schizophrenic motel owner gradually revealed to the camera certain "quirks" in his nature, which eventually came to include his transvestite habits and well-honed meat carving skills.

This was therapeutic for Edmund. True, he was getting used to staying at home, but he didn't entirely enjoy it. He had wanted to be asked to the dance, and when no one had extended an invitation, he had taken his chances.

He would begin easily enough: "Mary (or Justine or Cynthia or Jennifer or whoever it was out of about twenty nubile young females), I hate to be forward but..." And he would take the plunge.

Of course, the responses were not exactly encouraging:

"I'm sorry, I've already got a date."

"I'm sorry, I've... uh... got to... um... do something, uh, important."



Yeah, that's it. Real important. Life or death."

"Go to Hell, you little turd."

So he sat back and tried to shrug off the feeling of rejection by picturing each one of those twenty-odd girls in that famous shower of room number one.

It wasn't that Edmund was unattractive or that he possessed any particularly odious personal habits, it was just that he was *different*. Maybe it was the way he laughed aloud during the accident prevention films in chemistry class, or the twisted and mangled figures that he rendered in art class, or the strange and alien creations that he brought for lunch. Whatever it was, people had labelled him as different, and with that difference came the inevitable xenophobia.

So he was well-accustomed to spending an evening at home with only the VCR for company.

The amicable Mr. Bates was just discovering what "Mother" had been up to, when a loud, splintering crash sounded from the back door in the kitchen.

"Who's there?" Edmund asked the emptiness.

No one, he told himself. Something fell, that's all.

Edmund "paused" the movie and took a deep breath. His heart pounded a little faster, and his shirt stuck to his sweating body. *Oh God, he thought. Somebody's in here.* He looked around the room frantically, and let his eyes come to rest on the large brass poker by the fireplace.

Okay, let's go see what's what in the world...

He picked up the poker and crept towards the kitchen with mounting trepidation. He skulked along the hallway wall, moving at a cautious snail's pace. No further sound emanated from the kitchen.

Stop it, he scolded himself. You're just tense. Go back, sit down, and relax. A second opinion asserted itself in his mind. *Screw that. I'm going in. It'll just take a minute. Then I can relax.*

He reached the open doorway of the dark, unlit kitchen. Shadows of appliances took on the shapes of deranged motel owners and slaughtering schizos. His hand fumbled against the wall, madly searching for the elusive switch, which seemed to move away from his groping hand in the darkness. When he finally found the switch he simply stood there, frozen, one finger ready to illuminate the room ahead. He tightened his grip on the poker, clenched his teeth, and braced himself, flicking on the light. The illuminating globe overhead cast a yellow light throughout the room. Everything seemed in order: the kitchen counter was cluttered, the table was littered with the newspaper, the sink was filled with crusty dishes, and the back door was sporting the latest in fashionable large holes.

That doesn't quite fit the picture.

A large section of the door had apparently been chopped out,

leaving rough, splintered edges around the hole, and chips of wood strewn on the floor.

Edmund spun around to get out of the kitchen fast, but his path was blocked by a rather huge, bulky figure carrying a Paul Bunyan-sized axe and wearing lumberjack's clothing and a hockey mask. Edmund froze again and took the time to size up the "competition," weighing his essential odds of survival. He quickly stopped weighing these odds when he discovered that they were not altogether hopeful — also, he didn't think he could handle numbers of such magnitude.

Edmund was a dead man.

He slowly backed away from the figure, having flashing images of "Kibbles 'N Bits" taking his place in the world. However — although Fate had stuck a "Kick Me" sign on the poor boy's back — something deep inside managed to spur him on.

Having been shunned by the Powers That Be, Edmund chose to make a courageous last stand.

He made a nice effort.

"Wait a second here. Wait just one second, pal." Edmund confronted the figure.

The looming harbinger of death stopped, its axe suspended in the air in mid-descent.

"Let me get one thing straight," Edmund pressed on, oblivious to the concept of certain doom. "Do you intend to kill me?"

The figure patiently set down the axe on the kitchen table and mumbled something through the hockey mask.

"For God's sake, take off the damned mask! I can't hear a damned thing you're saying!" Edmund continued.

The figure slipped off the mask, revealing a rather ordinary male face. He looked down at the ground and said plainly, "Sorry. Yes, I'm going to kill you. At least, that's the general idea. There are some more subtle nuances of fear and such, but that's the main thrust of it. Yeah."

"Oh, that's really nice," Edmund bellowed at the hunching figure. "Did you ever stop to think that I might not want to be killed? Did you?"

"Well, nobody's ever actually objected before. Sure, they screamed a lot, but they never said 'Don't kill me,' or anything."

"Maybe you should have asked," Edmund said sternly. "What in the Name of God possessed you to want to kill me in the first place?"

"It's my job. I'm a psychopath. You know, like Jason Voorhies or Michael Myers or Freddie Krueger or Norman Bates—"

"Hold it right there. You can run off as many second-rate schlock-fest killers as you like, but you leave the classics out of this. The only people that go to see the slasher films are idiots or people looking for

a cheap laugh. The classics are on a completely different level. Look at you! That hockey mask of yours is a bit much. And an axe? I mean really: how *dull*. Couldn't you at least be original?"

"Sorry. Look, I'll just go. I'll kill someone else. It's no problem, I swear. I won't trouble you again. I'm really sorry."

"What about my door?"

"Oh. Right." The somehow deflated "killer" dug into his pocket and pulled out a leather wallet. He slipped out one hundred dollars and dropped it onto the table. "I hope that covers it."

"It better."

The psychopath-cum-spineless jellyfish picked up his axe and mask and trudged over to the back door. He turned and said pathetically, "Could you sort of keep this between you and me? I could lose my membership in the Rotary Club if word got out about this..."

Edmund nodded impatiently.

"You have a lovely house. Really. I'm sorry. Maybe we could do lunch sometime. Uh, goodbye."

Edmund waved absent-mindedly. The adrenaline was no longer coursing through his veins. Things were slowly returning to normal. Once again, he could be alone to watch his movies. Alone to brood over his absence from the dance. He wasn't at it and all those kids were having such a good time, glad to leave him out of it. He was lonely and alone: a social outcast. Maybe he'd be better off if... or maybe...

He grinned. "Wait." Edmund grabbed the man's arm. "It's getting kind of late and it could be a while before you find another victim..."

The man turned around, beaming. "I can kill you?"

"No. No, not that. But I do have a pretty good offer for you."

"And that is?"

Edmund smiled. "My friend, how do you like dances?" ☛

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DANVERS

by Marissa Kochanski

illustration by Peter Baker

Mrs. Mavis prided herself on being a good parent and a concerned individual.

So, to avoid all those nasty chemicals on regular vegetables and the high prices of organically grown, Mrs. Mavis planted her own little vegetable garden. In front of every window in their modest apartment was a double row of two-liter milk cartons, with the tops cut off. Inside each was some dirt she had dug up (a little at a time) from the caretaker's flower beds, a thin layer of store-bought potting soil, and a seed or two, carefully planted in the centre of each carton.

Ever since Mr. Mavis had gone away, Mrs. Mavis and her daughter, Susie, had lived alone. Susie had never been quite the same after his departure. Wistful, listless, not showing interest in the things that were supposed to interest seven year-old girls...

When Susie began to spend much of her time watching the infant vegetables growing on her window sill, Mrs. Mavis was delighted. She bought Susie her very own plastic watering can, with tulips embossed on the side.

"Susie," Mrs. Mavis would say, "I am so happy that you like your new watering can! Here, I'll help you. Honestly, those plants must be getting waterlogged with all that water you give them."

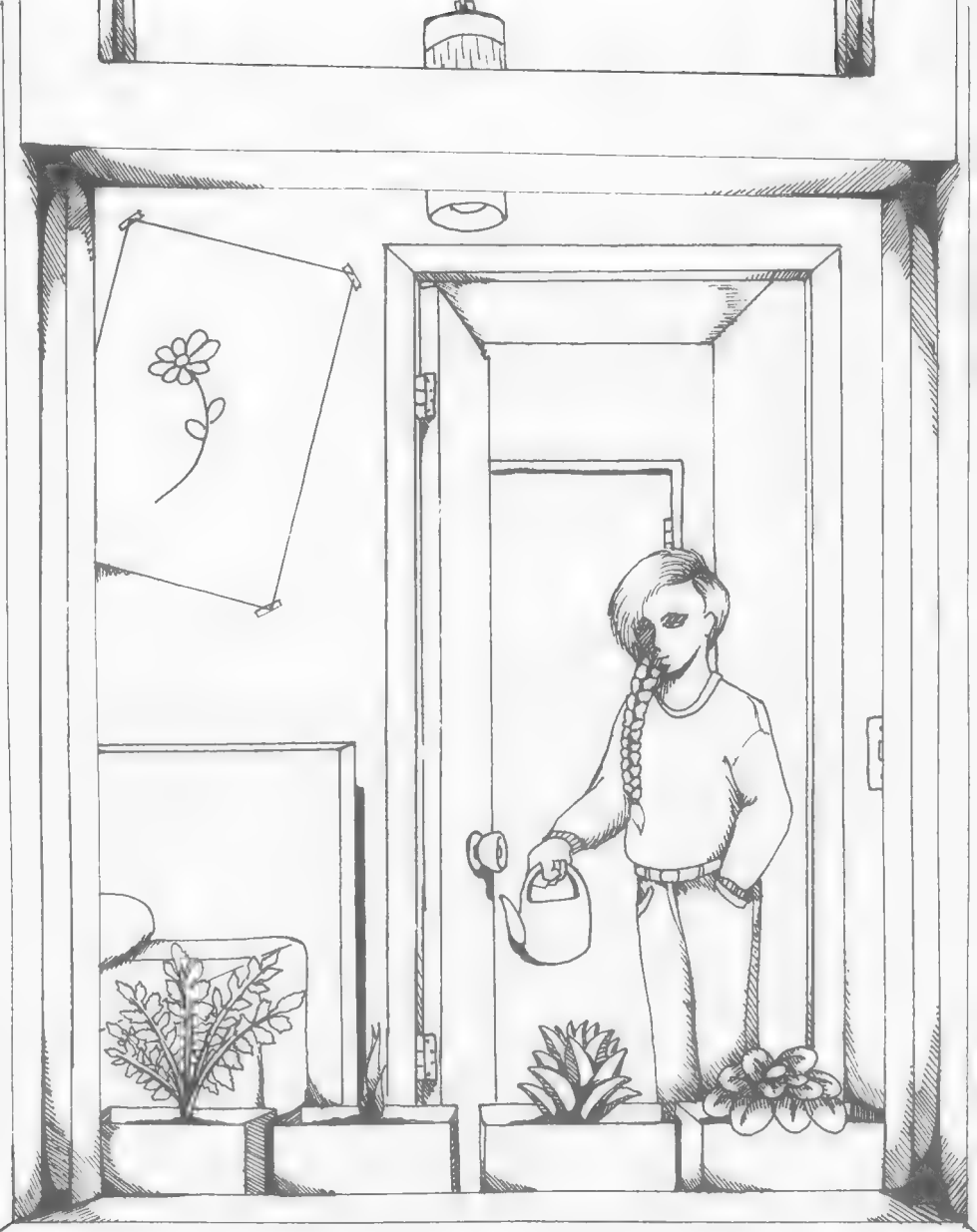
"Oh, no, Mummy," Susie would say seriously. "Danvers says lots of water is best."

"Is Danvers one of your little friends?"

Susie would nod.

"Okey dokey then, honey. Here, now. Careful, it's full."

It is beneficial for children to be close to nature, Mrs. Mavis thought. Susie's desire to look after the plants will help her to become



Peter Baker © '90

a caring, well-rounded person.

"Susie," Mrs. Mavis would say, when she checked to see if her daughter was in bed, "why is the window open? It's freezing in here!"

"The plants, Mummy. Danvers says they like fresh air."

"Is Danvers one of your little friends?"

Susie would nod.

"Okey dokey then, honey. I'll just get you another quilt."

It is best not to argue with children whenever possible, Mrs. Mavis thought. Letting them have their own way (within reason of course!) is a sure way of developing a healthy, inquisitive mind.

"Susie," Mrs. Mavis would say, "why are you rearranging the cartons? They were alphabetized."

"Danvers says they will grow straighter if I turn them, and everyone should have a chance to be right at the window."

"Is Danvers one of your little friends?"

Susie would nod.

"Okey dokey then, honey. Should I do the ones in the kitchen?"

This Danvers boy seems to be a good influence on Susie, Mrs. Mavis thought. His father must be a gardener.

"Susie," Mrs. Mavis would say, "are you sure you want to spend your allowance on fertilizer? I never used it before."

"Danvers says plants need it, Mummy," Susie would say, "and there was nothing else I wanted anyway."

"Is Danvers one of your little friends?"

Susie would nod.

"Okey dokey then, honey. Are you going to get the liquid or the little white balls?"

Mrs. Mavis was pleased that her garden was serving a dual purpose. Not only would the vegetables be ready to eat in no time at all, but Susie was learning financial responsibility.

One day Mrs. Mavis asked, "Why don't you invite your little friend, Danvers, over for dinner some time, Susie?"

Susie looked confused.

Mrs. Mavis nodded knowingly. Susie wasn't ready to bring friends over just yet.

"Susie," Mrs. Mavis would say, "I can hear you talking to yourself, and the music's on, too. Isn't it a bit noisy in there?"

"Oh no, Mummy. I wasn't talking to myself. Danvers likes music and talking."

"Danvers... Of course! Your little friend!"

Mrs. Mavis couldn't quite recall whether Susie had said Danvers liked music and talking, or Danvers had said plants like music and talking. She forgot to ask.

One day, while Susie was away at school, Mrs. Mavis went into her room to dust. She paused to admire the vegetables, which were

looking fine indeed. She read the labels that she had painstakingly penned two months before. Butterdew Lettuce, Violet Speckle Kohlrabi, Northern Crunch Cucumber, Danvers Carrot...

Danvers Carrot! What a magnificent carrot, and what a coincidence! Mrs. Mavis wondered if Susie had noticed they were growing a carrot with the same name as her little friend. She would try to remember to tell Susie when she got home.

Suddenly, Mrs. Mavis had the perfect idea.

When Susie came home from school, Mrs. Mavis was waiting at the door.

"Guess what?" Mrs. Mavis said, congratulating herself on her marvellous planning. All the varieties she had chosen were ready at the same time.

She held the bowl out proudly. "Our first salad of the year, from our very own garden!" Lettuce ripped into perfect bite-sized pieces, tiny crescents of celery, translucent circles of cucumber, cubes of magnificent Danvers carrot...

Susie's eyes rolled up in her head. She dropped to the floor. Mrs. Mavis could do nothing to revive her.

And after she had tried so hard to be a good parent!

Mrs. Mavis never could figure out where she had gone wrong. ☹

Apologies to...

...Chris Adams, whose illustration for the story "1990," was apparently eaten by Canada Post. Mailed well within our deadlines, the artwork never showed up.

...and to our readers. Because of our mislaid faith in Canada Post, we put the layout in a holding pattern. But by the first week of November, there was no more time left. With great regret, we were forced to finalize the layout and send the issue to the printer. We will definitely feature Chris Adams' work in a future issue.

"And the Lucky Winner Is..."

by Monica Hughes

illustration by Joel Sinclair

The heliolites soared above the river valley, clustering, separating.

To Jon, squinting up into the sunshine, they were like a cloud of brilliant butterflies. For just a moment he wished he were up there with them, but only for a moment. The one time he'd soared he'd felt so nauseated that he'd barely made it back to solid earth in one piece. The nausea, along with a hatred of crowds, seemed to be the flipside of his "gift." He'd gladly trade the shameful hidden skill of telekinesis for the chance to soar with his sister and his best friend. To be skilled in telepathy and telekinesis, gifts useful only to spies and other servants of the state, was a burden he would happily cast off. To be like Peri. To be free...

Peri, strapped in her harness, watched the city swing beneath her, a slowly rotating jigsaw of ceramic roofs, solar panels and streets, with the river cutting a random furrow through its geometric order. Directly below her she could see Jon, a dark dot on the field by the bridge. Kid brother, isolated as usual from the crowd.

She felt the chill of cloud-shadow on her cheek an instant before her heliolite lost power. Automatically she compensated, maneuvering neatly into the thermal that rose from the hot ground of the bluffs above the river. Around her the others moved smoothly into place on the funnel of warm air.

This was the best moment, soaring like a bird in the silence of the thermal. Without worry, at one with the air, she swung in her harness, leaning into the thermal, following it around. She forgot about her math test, so awful, but totally essential if she could ever hope to



work in the space program, about her brother Jon, more silent and separate from their friends every day, about Nev. Did Nev really love her as much as she loved him? As much as he said...Or was it really only a Senior Year relationship that meant no more to him than trying to beat her at squash or soaring? Everything was left behind in the wrinkled land below, as Peri soared in the silence.

Then the sun slid from behind an obscuring cloud to reactivate the tiny engines on the wing tips. She engaged the jets and soared out of the thermal, away from the crowd, up, up, to that breathtaking instant before stalling. Then she plunged and regained speed in a shiver of nylon wings. It was a tricky maneuver, one she had just perfected. Up here she was the best, and it felt good.

Over her shoulder Peri glanced at the others, just breaking free of the thermal like a cluster of firework stars. Something was badly wrong! One heliolite seemed to hesitate at the thermal interface, shuddered and plunged suddenly toward the ground. She saw its colour, a royal blue zagged with a lightning line of gold. Nev's!

In a single frozen instant she saw the tiny figure of Jon scurry across the field. Do something, Jon! her mind screamed. Reach out with your telekinesis. Grab him. Defy gravity. You can do it!

But Jon wasn't God, and Nev's heliolite continued to spin downward like a twisting maple key. Instinctively Peri cut the power to her props and followed it down in a steep frantic dive.

The nylon shivered and the wind screamed through the titanium frame as she approached the ground. She could see Nev's 'lite, broken below her, Jon running towards it. Now the ground was rushing towards her. She soared briefly to absorb speed and, in a series of roller coaster moves, came to a stop fifty meters away. Her fingers fumbled stiffly at the harness buckles. Come on. Come on. At last she was able to wriggle free, to run stiff-legged across the rough turf towards the broken heliolite. The fifty meters seemed forever.

"Nev! Nev!" She stumbled in the grass and Jon caught her arm.

"He's alive, Peri. I can still sense his life force. But..."

Nev lay still. His eyes were not quite closed and she could see a glint of white between the lids. He looked horribly not there, as if the Nev she knew were in some other place and this was only a shell.

The medics arrived, to slip a rigid collar around his neck, to ease a stretcher sheet under his body, wrapping him carefully and light-zapping the sheet to stiffness. She watched the cocoon that was Nev loaded aboard, watched the copter take off. Then she stood numbly, with the wind drying her lips, until Jon put his arm around her and helped her climb to the top of the bluffs, where the others waited outside the heliolite rental agency.

They crowded around. "What happened?" "What went wrong?" "How's Nev?" But there were no answers.

Hours later, in the hospital, Peri tried to explain to Nev's mother what had gone wrong. "We'd been trying out a new maneuver. I guess he didn't..." She stammered and was silent under the contempt in Mrs. Wright's eyes.

"If it hadn't been for you... you're always leading him on with your reckless ideas. Those crazy heliolites — they should be banned. What if he dies? What if he never walks again? Oh... oh..."

Peri flinched from her anger and her pain. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Wright. I'd give anything in the world for this not to have happened."

"Why do you want to do these crazy things? How come you can't be more like your brother? For all he's a year younger than you, he's got more sense, he's not so foolish as to..."

"That's not fair, Mrs. Wright." Jon stood protectively in front of Peri. "Nev's every bit as crazy about helioliting as Peri, honestly."

Then the doctor came and there were involved explanations about the realities of spinal cord injuries. Nev's mother began to cry, her mouth open in an ugly square.

Peri swallowed her own tears. "Oh, please don't cry, Mrs. Wright. It'll be all right. They've got new techniques. Micro-surgery and electric stimulation. It'll be okay." She turned to the authority in sparkling white, the silver caduceus winking in his left lapel. "Isn't that true, doctor? Tell her."

"Indeed, we have made amazing advances in the field of nerve regeneration in the last twenty years. Biochemistry. Electrical stimulation. It's a very lengthy process, of course. Labour intensive. Expensive."

Mrs. Wright twisted her fingers together. "I've got medical coverage. That'll take care of it, doctor."

"Your insurance will certainly cover the tests we've done so far and your son's stay in hospital for the next few days. You need have no concern on that account. Beyond that... well, talk to your insurance agent. You're looking at something in the neighbourhood of a quarter of a million dollars." The doctor's buzzer beeped.

"A quarter of a..."

"Excuse me. We'll have an opportunity to talk later. In the meantime, a visit to the accounting office will make procedures clearer to you."

He hurried away, leaving them standing in the middle of the waiting room.

Mrs. Wright turned on Peri, her mouth tight. "See what you've done. You've ruined both our lives with your stupid reckless games. A quarter of a million! How will I ever...?" She scrubbed her eyes angrily. "Oh, go away. Get out!"

Peri tried to protest, but Jon took her arm and pulled her along the corridor and through the doors into the sunlit grounds of the

hospital. "Don't cry. Don't pay attention to her. It's not your fault."

"Perhaps it is. I'm much better aloft than Nev. But he always wanted to catch up."

"It was his choice. You didn't twist his arm."

"Maybe I could leave school and get a job. Just to help pay for Nev's treatment."

"Mum and Dad'll never let you. Not in a million years. Besides, what about the space program?"

"That doesn't matter. Nothing matters except Nev getting better. Oh, Jon, what are we going to do?"

■

Peri put on a bright face to visit the hospital the next day, but it slipped off at the sight of Nev cradled in a paraplegic bed.

"Nev, I'm so sorry. It's all my fault."

He managed a grin. "You sound just like my Mom! I told her and I'm telling you and then let's forget about it, okay. I wasn't trying to copy your crazy stunt, I'm not that dumb. One of the struts snapped, that's all."

"Are you sure?" Relief flooded through her, followed by shame that it should make a difference. After all, it didn't help Nev a bit whether it was her fault or not.

"Quite sure. And the doctor had a bit of good news. Something called the Hi-med Lottery Fund. To help poor slobs like me who can't come up with a quarter of a million to get my legs back."

"Then it's okay?"

"Not exactly okay. But my National Security Number goes into the lottery locally for a bed in the neurological unit here. Every time there's a draw I get a chance."

"There can't be that many people with spinal cord injuries right here in town. The odds must be pretty good, don't you think?"

"I'm betting on it." Nev managed a grin and she grabbed his hand and held it against her cheek, turning her face away so he shouldn't see her tears.

When visiting time was up, Peri went in search of the doctor whose name was on the chart at the foot of Nev's bed. She found him in the cafeteria, coffee cup in hand.

"Please, can I talk to you about one of your patients, Nev Wright?"

"Are you a member of the family?"

"N... no. Not exactly."

"Then I can't discuss the patient with you."

"It's not that. I mean, I don't want to ask you about Nev. But the program... the lottery?"

"Yes? Do sit down, Miss... er..."

"Peri Stanley. I don't understand how the lottery works. "

"It's an experimental program. A real step forward in the

democratization of medicine, we believe. Any major procedure or experimental protocol consuming over a hundred thousand dollars in excess of medical insurance coverage is supported by the province, the clients being chosen by lottery."

"Yes, I know that bit. But how does it actually work?"

"Nev's National Security Number will be submitted to the city lottery foundation. Every month, during the regular drawings for prizes in the provincial lottery, several numbers are drawn randomly from those submitted by the City hospital system. If Nev's number is drawn, then his worries are over. Free medical treatment, physiotherapy, whatever's needed to get the boy back on his feet."

"And the odds, doctor? What are Nev's chances?" Peri burst out.

"There are enough funds to admit three persons a month to the centre."

"Three people? Out of how many? There can't be that many people with spinal cord injuries."

"You'd be surprised. Several hundred. Of course he can try again, up to two years. The chances of rehabilitation after that time become minimal."

"Three out of several hundred?" Peri choked on the words.

"Better than nothing." The doctor smiled wryly and got to his feet. "And you can always try to raise the money yourselves. People do, you know. Bake sales, marathons, that sort of thing. Excuse me, I must go. Good luck."

Luck, thought Peri miserably as she left the hospital. That's what it's going to take. Monumental, stupendous luck. Then she stopped so suddenly that the door swung against her shoulders as the person behind her pushed through.

"Pardon me."

"Sorry." Peri walked back home, her mind furiously going over the possibility. Jon. And his gift for telekinesis. Moving things with his mind. Small things, like dice. Or maybe the numbers in a lottery?

"You're crazy!" was Jon's reaction.

"You can change the odds, Jon, you know you can."

"But that's cheating, Peri. I won't cheat. And suppose someone found out. Can you imagine what my life'd be like if I ever let people know what I can do? The Government'd probably draft me or use me in experiments. I wouldn't have a life of my own. It'd be horrible."

"I know telekinesis is rare, but don't you think you're a bit paranoid about the Government. After all..."

"I've heard stories of people simply vanishing. Sucked into the system to be used. After all, Peri, they use dolphins to carry bombs and mines. Why should they be more fussy about people?"

Peri wrapped her arms around her chest and shivered. "I know, Jon," she said in a small voice. "But what about Nev?"

That was it, wasn't it? Jon thought gloomily, after he'd got away from his sister's pleading. What about Nev? He found himself reliving the nightmare moment when he realized that the heliolite was out of control, that his telekinetic power was useless, that he could no more stop the falling heliolite than he could stop the spin of Earth.

But now there was something he could do. Change the odds in the provincial lottery and undo the damage that his failure to help Nev had caused.

It's wrong, an inner voice told him clearly. Once you start using your powers to cheat, there's no end to it, is there?

Yes, but this is different.

No, it isn't. It's no different from always winning at backgammon, even if you don't try to throw double sixes.

His mind seesawed miserably to and fro between the opposite and irreconcilable facts, and he found himself hating Peri for having had the stupid brilliant idea in the first place.

*

Three days later the ambulance brought Nev home to his mother's apartment in the same block where Jon and Peri's family lived. He arrived in a flesh-coloured, permeable plastic body cast and a variable slant chair-bed.

Jon tried a light touch. "You're looking great. Apart from that bruise on your forehead." Stupid, he thought savagely. That the best you can do?

"And apart from being numb from the hips down I guess I'll survive." Nev sounded just as unreal.

"You'll be into rehab in no time," Peri burst out. "I've had this fabulous idea to beat the odds so that your number will come up right away."

"How are you going to do that, Mata Hari? You can't seduce the robot that runs the lottery — or can you?"

"Oh, don't be such an idiot. Telekinesis."

"You, Peri? You've got as much psi ability as a plastibrick wall."

"She's thinking of me, Nev. It's crazy. The numbers are probably generated in a computer concealed in a sealed vault somewhere."

"But they aren't, Jon." Colour flooded Nev's face. "I asked about it in hospital. The lottery's run in public, with a live audience, and one of those old-fashioned bingo machines that throw up the numbers randomly. Anyone can go and watch. Mostly they give out prizes, but they run the Hi-med Lottery at the same time."

"Nev, are you saying you think it'll work? You really want me to try it?"

"Of course he does," Peri shouted at him. "You can't not. Jon, you're my one and only brother, but I swear I'll never talk to you

again if you don't at least try to help Nev."

"Take it easy, Peri. Back off. It's Jon's decision." Nev interrupted.

"I don't even know if I can do it to order, or if it's like dreams, something that just happens."

"It'll be okay. Jon. I'll help you practise. All we need to start working is Nev's National Security Number." She pushed up his sleeve and ran her thumb over the digits tattooed there. "24-2-30... your birthday. I remember that part. Four days before mine. Then 005193... right?"

"Eleven numbers. Think you can handle that many, Jon?"

"I dunno, Nev. But I can try."

■

Now that the choice was out of his hands, Jon pushed the guilt and worry to the back of his head and concentrated on honing his telekinetic powers. Peri wrote the numbers zero through nine over and over again on table tennis balls and put them in an antique pickling jar that their mother used as a vase, and Jon began to practise plucking out the digits of Nev's security number in order. After three weeks Jon had a permanent headache and Peri was nervous enough to jump out of her skin.

"It's no good. My brain's turning to mush, and my psi abilities aren't getting any better. Like I said in the beginning — I don't think it's a thing you can force." Jon sighed. "I'm afraid it's hopeless."

"It's my fault. I've been pushing you too hard. Why don't you take a rest. After all it's three days..." Her voice wobbled. "Three whole days till the lottery."

■

Peri and Jon waited in line outside the convention centre until the doors were opened and the crowd pushed in.

"We've got to get close to the front," Jon warned her.

"I know." Peri gasped, the wind knocked out of her as an elbow-jabbing woman pushed past them.

They managed to get seats in the front row close to the enormous number-generating machine. It was edged with garish fluorescent lights, red, orange, blue and purple, which flashed on and off in rhythm with the latest hyperpunk.

Jon groaned. "It'll be hard to concentrate with all that going on."

Peri squeezed his arm. "You'll manage. I know you will." She turned, so he wouldn't see her face and guess how nervous she really was, and stared around the hall.

The seats were filling up fast. Streamers hung from the ceiling, twisting in the air-conditioning. LOTTOLOTTOLOTTO they spelled endlessly. The crowd noises rose to beat the hyperpunk. The lights flashed. She could feel the tension zapping at her nerves, tightening

her skin. Her stomach flipped uneasily.

"Surely not all these people have friends needing help?" She turned back to Jon.

"I'll bet not one of them is here for the Hi-med Lottery. Take a look at the program."

"Win a Mazda hovercraft... a home fusion unit... but this isn't what we're here for."

"Down near the end." Jon pointed. "Three rehabilitation places at Healing Hands Medical Unit. Just before drawing the numbers for the Provincial Lottery. That's what everyone's here for, I guess, the big prize — a tax-free year for the whole family."

As he spoke the lights and sound mercifully dimmed and the Master of Ceremonies glided out into the spotlight, a smoothfaced android familiar to Peri from news and weather reports on the local channel. There'd been an occasion, Peri heard a woman in the row behind her whisper, when an irate loser had gunned down the lottery MC, so it was no longer a favoured post for a human, despite the publicity. If there should be another incident, well, androids were replaceable.

"Welcome to the twenty-ninth running of the new provincial lottery. I hope you all have your National Security Numbers on you — har-har. Today it may be your turn to win a home composter, a water purification unit, a super hovercraft. And, as I'm sure you all know, the big prize today is... "

"Jon, what about...?"

"Sh. He'll get to it. Just listen."

"And folks, between the draws for the home composter and the big prize, we will, as usual, draw three places for hospital beds in the rehab unit of the City Hospital. The lucky winners will receive the very latest in scientific treatment absolutely free! So come on, all you folks here and at home watching this programme — brought to you by the makers of NoZone, the cream that guarantees freedom from skin cancer — let's begin our evening of fun and excitement."

■

An hour and a half dragged by for Peri and Jon. The numbered balls flipped up and down on the current of air in the machine. Randomly one would pop out, and Smoothface would announce the number. As the eleventh and final number popped out, the central computer searched out the name and telephone of the lucky winner. Within a minute the audience was treated to a display of hysterical joy, brought by home videophone to the big screen above the stage. Instant win. Instant emotion. Between the draws the audience ate sushi and fried squid.

"Look, Jon. Something's happening."

Two workwomen in coveralls, who probably earned less in a

year than Smoothface's owner earned in a night, wheeled on a smaller machine, decorated with fluorescent H's, which blinked frenetically on and off.

"... and now, folks, for those unfortunate few who have suffered traumatic accidents in the past year, the City Hospital's Hi-med Lottery brings you the Healing Hands Hope Chest! In this transparent container," Smoothface sent on, "are the National Security Numbers of all those poor folks in need of a boost — a boost which we intend to give them tonight."

Peri could see that each of the balls in this container was much larger, large enough to have an entire NS number printed on its sides. This was going to be totally different from extracting the right digit from zero to nine, and getting it right eleven times. Finding the ball with Nev's number on it within a container of several hundred was like pinpointing one star in a galaxy with one's eyes shut.

"Jon, what'll we do?" She grabbed his arm.

"It's the dregs, I know. But I'll try just visualizing Nev's number and willing it up. Maybe it'll work. Maybe we'll have to call this a practice run for the next lottery, or the one after."

"But..."

Jon was no longer listening. He closed his eyes. Peri could see the muscle at the corner of his jaw quiver and tense. She doubled her fists in her lap so that the nails dug into the palms.

The balls began to bounce on the current of air within the machine, rattling as they moved randomly around. She stared and caught her breath in a gasp. Up the near rim of the container a single ball wriggled upward, against gravity, to bob on the air stream. She looked quickly around. Had anyone else noticed the unusual movement?

Most of the audience had left the stands for a drink of lo-al beer and a sushi snack. To them, this was the boring interlude before the main event. Those who remained were talking, joking, rustling their programs. Some twisted theirs into paper airplanes and glided them towards the stage. Peri looked anxiously at Jon. Would this nonsense distract him? But it was all right. His eyes were still shut, concentrating.

Then she saw her. A woman dead centre in the front row was staring intently at the machine. Peri remembered her. The woman who'd jabbed her out of the way as they had jostled in the doorway. She could still feel the bruise on her ribs.

In a sea of munching mouths, her face stood out. Her eyes were narrowed, her forehead furrowed. She looked as if she wasn't even breathing.

Peri's eyes darted back to the number generator. Another ball was creeping up the side. It spun against the one she guessed that Jon was guiding and hovered beneath the narrow exit passage. Jon's

ball jostled it, they spun apart and, as they ricocheted off the walls of the container, a third ball was hiccuped into the exit and rolled into the MC's outstretched hand.

"... and the lucky winner is... 91-07-13-02547. In one moment we will see for ourselves..." A picture flashed onto the screen. A lean man propped in a wheel-chair, neckbrace forcing his chin up, someone's hand holding the phone to his ear. Smoothface spoke into his mike. "Mr. James Rierdon. I guess they'll be calling you lucky Jim tonight, eh, Mr. Rierdon? Free rehabilitation at the city hospital! Congratulations and big hand for Mr. Rierdon!"

As the screen blanked out there was a spatter of applause and then the crowd noise filled the hall like the wind against a diving heliolite. The balls began to bubble on their air jet. Up and over. Down and up. Again one ball edged up to the surface, stayed there, fighting gravity. A second ball rose beside it.

Like two gladiators in the ring, thought Peri. Each feinting, watching the other's move, ready to block it, to be the first beneath the narrow exit. She saw the MC's hand move. Both balls rolled towards the opening. And jammed. Neither gave a millimeter. Sweat ran down Jon's face. Six seats to her right Peri saw the woman's face glisten pallidly under the bright lights.

"Sorry, folks." Smoothface smacked the side of the old machine. The woman's body jolted as if she had been hit. Peri heard Jon grunt in pain. "Little jam-up here," the android went on. "A bit more air to stir them up again and... here we are. The lucky winner is 15-11-03-47892!"

Once more a picture flashed on the screen, this time of a woman in her mid twenties lying in a quadriplegic's harness.

"Congratulations on your win, Daisy Jones. Daisy's been waiting for electrotherapy and nerve surgery for a long eight months following a car accident. Remember, folks, your driving safety depends on a good computer program. Keep your module checked!"

Their opponent's face was dead white. She looked as if she might faint any second now. If she does, a small ugly voice said clearly in Peri's head, then we've got it made. Now she knew that Jon had the mental strength and the skill to pull Nev's number up. Third time lucky...

But Jon was on his feet, grabbing Peri's arm. "We're getting out of here."

"What's the matter? You're so near..."

At the door he turned and waited. The MC's smooth voice reached them faintly. "... and the lucky winner is... baby Alison Temple. Baby Alison was born with severe cerebral palsy. Now, with the latest techniques of muscle and nerve rehabilitation..." His voice was lost in a torrent of laughter and sobs. "Ladies and gentlemen, right here

in the audience, here is Mrs. Temple, little Alison's mother! What a moment! Mrs. Temple, would you like to tell us exactly what you're feeling right now..."

Jon put his arm through Peri's and pulled her through the crowd, past the stalls selling lucky T-shirts, stuffed bean cakes, four-leafed clovers and vials of moon dust. Tears ran down Peri's face and she brushed them away angrily.

They walked on until they came to the footbridge across the river. It was hung with paper lanterns, and the pleasure boats beneath looked like illuminated water beetles. Here Jon stopped.

"I could read that woman's thoughts, Peri. So strong. I could see her baby, and what treatment could do for her. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. And it'd be the same the next time round, the next lottery, wouldn't it? Always the knowledge that if we cheated so Nev's number would come up it'd be at someone else's expense."

"How are you going to tell him?" Her angry tears splashed on the parapet. "What's the use of your esper skills if you can't even help Nev? I just hate you, Jon!"

He looked away from her anger, staring absently down at the strings of lights reflected in the water. They blinked on and off. White. Red. Green. Idly he switched the order. Red. White. Green. And back again. Suddenly he straightened up and whistled. His eyes sparkled. "Maybe I can do something for Nev after all, Peri." He walked quickly away from her through the brightly dressed crowd.

*

Three months later, when Peri and Jon were making their daily visit to Nev's apartment after school, Nev grinned at Jon. "I think you can tell her now."

"Really?"

"Tell me what? Hey, you two, what's been going on?"

"I got the idea on the bridge that night, the lottery night, looking down at the coloured lights. And it made me think about the damaged nerves in Nev's spine. And whether telekinesis would be useful. So I went to the medical library and did some reading, and... well, anyway, Nev and I've been working on it for the last while."

"Working on what?"

"This."

Slowly, thoughtfully, Nev wiggled his toes. ☺

Editoribus horribilis by Hazel Sangster

As a writer, it is often far too easy to imagine the editor as enemy — as the monster lurking in the closet waiting to pounce on our dangling participles, the green slime slithering and smothering our favourite character, the alien invader clubbing our first efforts with its superior technology.

At *ON SPEC* (as at most small magazines, I imagine), we editors don't see ourselves like that at all. In fact, we're a pretty regular bunch. Avid readers and writers of speculative fiction and poetry, we first got together to talk about what we were writing and reading. It soon became pretty obvious that one of our problems was that there was no market in Canada for our stuff — and so *ON SPEC* was born.

Let me explain how we choose which stories/poems go into each issue of *ON SPEC*, including the special issues. When the manuscripts arrive, we all read all the material. We rate each story on a scale of 1 ("great, terrific, publish just as it is") to 4 ("this one doesn't work for us" or "it doesn't work, period"). Then we get together and choose about 15 of the top stories to send to our expert editorial board. They all read, rate and send the stories back to us, and the final selection is then made.

There are usually about four or five stories (out of well over 100) that everyone likes. Then there are a batch of stories that some people love and other people hate. Reading is a selective, subjective process. This is something that we writers have to constantly remind ourselves of. If we reject your story, it's not because it's just plain awful, it's usually far more complicated than that. So when the story comes back, read it over, look at the editorial comments, rewrite it in part or totally, and then send it back out again — soon.

There is no magic formula for a good story (apologies to the poets and artists, but this article will deal mostly with short fiction), but there are a few basics that will help your chances of publication. Surprisingly, some of these basics have nothing to do with your writing, but with *format*. If your manuscript is not in the format accepted by a particular magazine, it may be rejected without even being read. Your story must be presented properly — double spaced (typewritten or word processed) in black ink on 8.5" x 11" white paper. A messy manuscript just doesn't have a chance. Similarly, sloppy spelling, grammar and sentence structure will get you nowhere. Call Alberta Culture at 427-2554, or check out a book like *The Canadian Writer's Market* for more information on how to submit a manuscript. All markets have their own written guidelines on how to submit. Send a SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope) for one, and be sure to read a copy of the magazine before you submit.

I don't base my personal evaluation of a good speculative story on any textbook formula. It's simpler than that. Does the story hold my

interest? Do I believe in the world and the characters that you have created? Do I believe in the situations you have placed them in, their reactions to those situations, and the final outcome? If the answer to these questions is yes, then it is because the mechanics, the language, the characterization, the structure and your original idea are all working together.

There are certain things that “pop” me out of the story. In speculative fiction you are creating a different world, peopled by creatures of your imagination — but you have to make your readers believe in that world. Any inconsistencies will jolt your reader back to the current world. So the place, the time and the action of your story must create a *complete, believable scene*. Your characters must fit into that scene in terms of how they look, act and speak. Of course, you can be creative, and use universal situations in futuristic settings. But if your reader stops, wrinkles her brow and becomes confused, then there’s something wrong.

I get confused by frequent changes in *point of view*. If you have to turn back a page to follow the storyline, then the story isn’t working. Most short stories keep one point of view, simply because it is easier to make a story work that way.

Many of the stories we read have hugely imaginative settings, unique, believable characters, supported by good writing — but they don’t go anywhere. In order for a story to hold my interest, there has to be some *conflict*. It doesn’t have to be all-out nuclear war or an action-packed adventure story — it could be the internal conflict within a character or an emotional tug-of-war between two characters. But when conflict lags, interest usually sags.

And this conflict has to carry through right to *the end*. On reading through our comments at a recent rating session, many of the stories had comments like, “great story that fizzled out,” or “disappointing ending.” Endings are hard. You don’t have to tie all the loose ends together, but there has to be a conclusion that will satisfy your readers. You do have to suggest or create change — in your characters or your world.

Having said all that, let me repeat: there are few ultimate rights and wrongs in the art of writing. And ON SPEC’s opinion represents the subjective views of a group of individuals. If you want to write and have the creative imagination to create new worlds and characters, then never stop writing. Write something every day. Be prepared to put in an apprenticeship. Any published author will say the same thing— four pages a day for four years, ten rejections to one acceptance, etc. etc.

Let someone who is a good writer read your story before you send it out, someone who will give you an honest opinion, not a friend who will just tell you it’s great!

And most of all, never give up. Treasure the encouragement you get, use constructive criticism as a learning tool, and file negative criticism away for the day when you can take it out and laugh at it. Treat writing as a process — a way through which you understand your own life experiences — and the rewards will naturally follow. ☛

ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Keynyn Brysse (a.k.a. **Tobi Gillespie**), winner of The Speculative Fiction Association's Short Story Contest, is a 16 year-old senior in the International Baccalaureate Program at McNally Composite High School in Edmonton. Her first publication, at the age of 9, was a poem in *The Edmonton Journal*, and four other poems appeared in various issues of the *Alberta Poetry Yearbook*. This is her first prose publication.

Edmontonians **Cairo & X**, the 18-year-old winners of the '89 and '90 Teen Festival of the Arts Writing Competition in Edmonton, both like Swiss cheese. Cairo & X are also unusual in that their material is the only collaborative effort *ON SPEC* has ever received for which one of the collaborators happens to be invisible.

Cory Doctorow was born in 1971. He lives in Toronto and attends S.E.E.D. Alternative School. His interests include the co-op movement and the movement for peace and social justice. This is his first professional sale.

Jeb Gaudet is currently in his second year at Trinity College, University of Toronto, studying Genetics. He writes as an escape from the Sciences and uses his spare time to work on his novel, *Handbook for Heroes*. "Portrait of a Psychopath" is his first professional publication.

Christine Gertz is seventeen years old and is currently enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Program at McNally High School, Edmonton. In 1989, she won the Alberta Speculative Fiction Association Contest at ConText '89. This is Christine's first professional publication.

Monica Hughes is an Edmonton writer with twenty-two novels and numerous short stories in anthologies to her credit. She is also the recipient of numerous awards in Canada and around the world. She particularly enjoys encouraging beginning and young writers through frequent teaching positions, workshops, and writer-in-residencies.

Marissa Kochanski (whose family grow their own vegetables) is a sixteen year-old student at Parkland Composite High School in Edson, Alberta.

Nicole Luiken wrote her first book at the age of 13. Six years later, she has written 15 juvenile novels and has 3 published books to her credit: *Unlocking the Doors*, *Escape to the Overworld*, and her newest, *The Catalyst*. Nicole won the 1989 YTV Youth Achievement Award in the category of writing. She is currently taking a library technician course at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton.

Reg Silvester's second book of fiction, *Wishbone*, was published this fall by Coteau Books. He is the current Vice-President of the Writers

Guild of Alberta.

Peter Tupper is an undergraduate at the University of British Columbia. This story, part of a future history called *The Bishop Years*, began as a grade 11 Creative Writing assignment, and was part of a portfolio that won Peter the Roy Daniels Creative Writing Scholarship in September, 1990.

Rhonda Whittaker, 18, presently attends St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. She has also had an essay published, which won first prize in a competition held by the *Times Transcript* of Moncton, New Brunswick.

ABOUT OUR ARTISTS

Andrea Baeza is halfway through her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. She works at a local comic shop.

Peter Baker, fourteen, who attends Holy Cross School in Edmonton, spends his time drawing and painting. This is his first published work.

Our cover artist, **Deven Kumar**, is eighteen and currently applying to Banff School of Fine Art. He has displayed paintings at Flights of Fantasy Bookstore in Edmonton and at the University of Alberta.

In his first year of Engineering at Grande Prairie Regional Collage, **Chris Harper** is eighteen. He has previously done some work for Wizard's, a fantasy bookstore.

Aaron Johnston, fifteen, attends Grade 10 at Cobequid Education Centre in Truro, Nova Scotia. He has had a poem published in *Entropic Void*, and plans to be a comic writer/artist.

While finishing up at Victoria Composite High School in Edmonton, **Jason Queck** is working on a comic to be self-published next spring, and has numerous commercial and personal projects planned.

Eighteen year-old **Tom Paquette** plans a career in art. In Grade 11 at M.E. Lazerte in Edmonton, this is his first published work.

Another of our contributors who plans a career as an artist, **Terry Poitras** is seventeen and currently attending McCoy High School in Medicine Hat, Alberta. This is his first professionally published artwork.

Twenty year-old **Joel Sinclair** of Edmonton returns for a second appearance in the pages of *ON SPEC*. He designs jewelry and airbrushes T-shirts.

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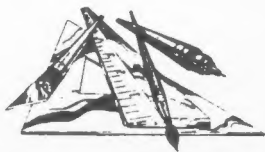
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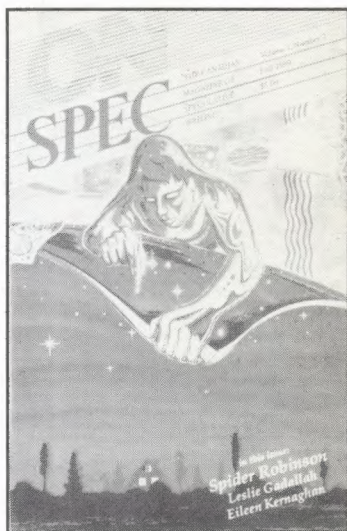
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